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# Thoughts of a first year teacher: Know Your Students

Caitlin King

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**Thoughts of a first year teacher: Know Your Students**

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## **Dedication**

This Ethnographic Narrative is dedicated to a multitude of people. First I would like to thank my family who endlessly support me in all of my endeavors. Mom, Dad, and Ian, without you none of this would have been remotely possible and I am eternally grateful for your constant love and support. Thank you for allowing me to write in silence.

Secondly I would like to thank my grandparents, Betty and Jack. You are the strength that keeps me going in the most difficult times. I never would have been able to complete this program without your love and support. Grampy you are forever my guardian angel and this paper is truly for you; I know you would have loved to read every single page of this and then we would have discussed everything in it.

To the professors who truly made a difference at CGU: Jennifer Strom, Jennifer Emshoff, Lovette Donaldson, and Keisha Goosby. All of you inspired me in so many ways throughout this journey. I could not have completed any of this without your guidance, support, and knowledge. You are truly the best mentors that I could have ever received in my time at CGU, I will forever be thankful that I had the opportunity to learn from every single one of you.

To Period 2, my Awesome Possums. You are the inspiration behind this work. You are all more amazing than you will ever know. Keep reaching for your dreams and achieve your goals, you are all so capable of anything and everything. Thank you for allowing me to film, ask questions, and upset our routine at times. I could not have asked for a better class to work with.

Finally, to my cohort: Katie, Aria, Becca, Miranda, and Davon/Darwin. We all know that without one another we would have never survived this immense journey. I will always remember the lunches, Eureka, arriving “late”, and laughing until we could not breathe. I have

found life-long friends in all of you and it is such a blessing. Thank you for encouraging me and supporting me during one of the hardest times of my life; I do not know what I would have done without you all by my side. In the end we did it, we proved V. wrong and we never quit. Heres to us!

### **Abstract**

This Ethnographic Narrative is a research based look into the lives of socially disadvantaged students in a low-income area. It breaks down the assests and needs of each student individually and discusses how to better help them academically and socially based on their individual personalities and needs. The narrative also discusses the community in which these individual students live and attend school, it looks at research on the community to determine how each student is affected by the city that they live in. Finally the narrative concludes by looking at the teacher over the course of this past year and how this teacher developed in their profession and developed with each individual student. After extensive research and hands on experiences, my findings have pointed me in one direction: the more that a teacher gets to know their students outside of their academic skills, the more a teacher is going to be able to work with and mold their students. If students feel appreciated and respected, then they are willing to complete their work with ease. Teachers will have wonderful years in this profession when they truly know the students that they are working with.

## **Preface**

In this narrative you will get to know three individual students, Sean, Sarah, and Taylor. Each of them come from very different backgrounds and they struggle with different things in life and in school. As you read you will understand why I chose to focus on these three students. Their personalities and unique characters will make you want to know them more. In person they are vibrant, exciting, and extremely wonderful to work with. I feel extremely blessed that I had the opportunity to meet these students and get to know them on a very personal level. I also enjoyed learning more about the community that I work in. While it is not an extremely wealthy or affluent area, it is small and rural, which is just what I like. I hope you enjoy reading about my first year as a teacher and the immense journey that started with a scared person who did not know what to expect and ended with a confident teacher who learned and developed right alongside their students.

**Part A: *Who am I & why do I want to be a teacher?***

The decision to become an educator was not a hard one for me. I knew when I was a little girl that I wanted to become a teacher. I would line up my stuffed animals on my bed every morning before I left for school and I would tell them what they were going to be learning that day while I was away. The mindset of teaching others has always been prevalent in my life, so it makes sense to me that I continued to nurture my passion for learning as I got older. My style of teaching and the subject matter that I want to focus on may have changed, but my passion for instilling the desire to learn in others has not. This narrative will answer the critical question of who I am and why I want to be an educator by looking at my background, my family, and the experiences that have brought me to this point in my life. To begin, I need to start at the beginning, my family background.

My family is a mixture of everything in Europe, from Hungary to Scotland, we really cover the map. My parents raised my brother and I in a small town called Covina tucked away in the heart of the San Gabriel Valley. The four of us have lived in the same house for over twenty years and we have attended the same church for even longer. We are a strong Christian family, our faith guides all of our decisions, it provides us with a moral compass which we live our lives according to. This faith influenced the decision to send my brother and I to a private school from pre-school until eighth grade. This school helped me develop into the person I am today, including cementing my desire to become a teacher. I had no idea at that age that private school teachers do not always require a teaching credential, nor did I understand the stark difference in their pay in respect to public school teachers. What I did understand was the passion that I saw coming from every teacher I had. They not only cared about the subject matter that they taught,



but they cared about each student individually, taking an interest in our lives. These teachers showed me that it is possible to do it all; you can teach your curriculum while reaching your students on a personal level, and this is the kind of teacher that I want to be. High school was another world for me, public school was something that I had never experienced before. I had classmates that were expelled our freshman year for drinking and doing drugs on campus. Our high school had a zero tolerance policy but I did not quite understand what that meant until it was put into action with those five students. I also had a classmate that tried to attack me with a stapler because I would not try his “special brownies,” he was also expelled. These experiences were a wake up call for me, the small private school life I had been living was over, and this was the reality that most students faced on a daily basis. I considered myself lucky for not having to deal with these issues in elementary and middle school, I truly believe that my parents made the right decision. High school was difficult for me though, I found myself slipping into a pattern of laziness, turning in assignments half completed or not at all, skipping classes, and letting my grades fall. I wanted to go to a good college, but my actions in school did not reflect it. To this day I am still not sure why I developed this bad habit, all I know is that it took awhile for me to turn it around. I was not accepted into any of the colleges that I applied to, I only got into CSULB because my dad had a friend on the board of admissions for all CSUs. I started my first year of college with the same lazy attitude that I had during my last year in high school. My grades were falling, I was not attending my classes regularly, and after only one year in college, I was disqualified from the university. Being kicked out of school was very hard on me and my family, but it was the best thing for me. It was the kick in the pants that I needed to get myself together and start taking school seriously. It took me five years before I was accepted back into

CSULB as a full time student, but once I was there I did not stop until I graduated. I finished the rest of my degree in two quick years, and they were probably the best two years in school that I have ever had.

During those five years away from CSULB I learned a lot about myself and the teacher that I wanted to become. I did not do it on my own though, I owe a lot to the teachers and professors that guided me and stood by me as I discovered myself. These role models in my education really showed me the strength that I had inside, they also showed me my true passion in the world of education and they helped me cope with the decision to change my major. I always wanted to teach elementary school, young students held a soft spot in my heart, but the more experiences I gained in elementary classrooms, the more I questioned my place there. I came to realize that while I loved elementary children, I did not see myself working with elementary students for the rest of my career. Once I got over that mental hurdle, I was able to open myself up to new possibilities. One of my professors helped me discover my passion for English, as did two of my high school English teachers. With their help I came to the realization that I had always had a passion for English, but I was so set on teaching elementary school that it prevented me from seeing anything else. When I was accepted back into CSULB, I made sure that I was accepted as an English Education major so that I could begin taking the right classes. Everything else fell into place for me after that. I enjoyed going to class and I liked the material that I was learning. I felt that I had finally found my place, it all clicked for me. Class presentations became easier for me because I really enjoyed the material that I was presenting to my classmates. I also had multiple opportunities to work with high school age students within my college classes, and it was a lot of fun for me. I learned a lot from these students and they

helped me on my journey to become a high school English teacher. I know that I am going to be a good teacher someday because of my school experiences. I understand the reluctance to learn and the desire to skip class. I can relate to my students on a personal level, and that is going to be my best tool as a teacher, the ability to place myself at their level. But while I may understand where they are at, it will not become an excuse for my students to stop caring, it will be a tool to reach them and find the heart of their problem. I truly believe that I was meant to be in the field of education to make a difference in the lives of my students. If I can help one student that is struggling to learn, then I know that I have made all the difference. People always talk about how difficult high school students are, how scary it is to teach them, but I know that deep down, they are just like anyone else with personal struggles and a desire for someone to listen to them. I will be that person that instill a desire to learn in them by listening to them and not just pushing them off on the next teacher.

In order to be a teacher, you have to be strong. Strong minded, strong willed, strong in every area of life. Your students have to know that they can rely on you for anything, and your strength as a person will show them that. Teachers also have to be strong in their subject matter, it only takes one moment of weakness for your students to see that you do not understand the material that you are teaching. It takes good communication and speech skills to be an effective teacher. You may not always understand the material, or you may be having an off day, but the age old adage remains true, fake it till you make it. Do not let your students see you sweat, be strong in front of your class. If I have learned one thing, it is that you do not want to answer a students question with I don't know. You can always open it up to the rest of the class to answer the question. If no one is able to answer it, tell your students that it has become a quick

homework assignment for them. You want them all to go home and try to find the best answer for the question, and when you all come back tomorrow you will have a class discussion on what you have all found. If you want to try another route, let your students know that the answer is not coming to you right now but you will get back to them at lunch when you have had more time to think about it. These are skills that I have learned throughout my education and I plan on implementing them in my classroom someday. My family has always said that I have been blessed with good communication skills and I know that it will benefit me as a teacher. However, it is important to know your strengths as well as your weaknesses, and I know one of my weaknesses that will need to be worked on. I have a tendency to talk for long periods of time, and that will not be beneficial in a classroom setting. High school students will tune out if their teacher is talking for too long, so I will need to work on that. It is essential to break up lectures with activities of any kind, and I need to use those in my classroom. I know that I will probably make the mistake of lecturing for too long, and it will be a good lesson for me, but I am hoping to avoid that if I can by realizing the problem now and implementing procedures to fix it.

Besides academic realizations, it is also essential for teachers to understand their own personal strengths and limitations. I believe that my personal strengths and limitations go hand in hand. One of my strengths is the ability to connect with my students on a personal level, I am able to talk with them, reason with them, and understand where they are at. This can also be a limitation though because I will take their problems personally. This does not mean that I will always think my students are out to get me, it means that I will take their problems to heart and it will affect me. I will be sad for them, and I will try to help them in every aspect. But you cannot take every problem home with you. There needs to be a separation between work and personal

life, otherwise teachers would never be able to relax. I need to learn that if I cannot help my students personal problems then I need to let it go. They are going to live their own lives, and there comes a point when the teacher has to realize this. Some students are not going to enjoy English, and that is okay. I do not need every one of my students to have a passion for English, I just need to find a way for them to enjoy it so that they can pass their classes and pursue their true passions. I do not enjoy math, but I had teachers and professors that found ways to make it interesting so that I could pass. They knew that I did not want to become a math teacher, so they did not need to instill a deep passion for math inside of me, they just needed to make it interesting enough for me to enjoy it while I was taking the specific class. This is something that every teacher and professor needs to learn, and I know that I will need to learn it too.

Something else that teachers need to learn/realize is that every student learns differently and those different styles of learning need to be nurtured in a classroom setting. Take me for example, I am a kinesthetic learner which means that I learn by doing. I need to be hands on in order to truly understand the concepts that are being taught to me. But not everyone learns this way, some people learn through simple auditory instructions, while others learn in a verbal way. These styles are different from one another, but that does not mean that they cannot all be represented in classroom instruction. Auditory learners can hear instructions and start their work, but verbal learners need more than that. So a quick remedy could be to have your students repeat the instructions to a neighbor and check for understanding with the assignment. You might also have a visual learner who needs diagrams and posters around the room to help them understand their work. It is also essential to put these diagrams on homework assignments so that your students can have a visual aid to help outside of the classroom. Kinesthetic learners like myself

need to actually do the work to understand it. So having small assignments or problems for the students to solve during lecture breaks is a great way for hands on learners to really grasp the material. The last thing that any teacher wants to do is hinder their students learning, so by understanding the different ways that students learn, teachers can be prepared for each and every class that they receive.

While it is all well and good to have these desires and understand these strengths and limitations, it is still a scary field to enter into. But I have to remind myself that I chose this profession, and I chose it for a good reason, I want to make a difference in the lives of others and I know that I can do that through high school students. Education is key to being a well rounded individual, I truly believe that everyone should take college classes just for the experience and knowledge. Community college is an amazing place for students who do not want to spend a lot of money and are still trying to figure out what they want to do. Even if someone knows that they want to be a mechanic and they do not need college classes for that profession, I still believe that a few classes could help them. Taking a business class to learn more about running your own mechanic shop, taking a communication course to get better at talking with customers, or even taking a nutrition course to learn more about eating healthy and living a longer life. These classes are all beneficial to everyone, and I want to make sure that my students know the options that are open to them. My job is not just about teaching English and sending my students off to their next class, it is about instilling deeper passions in them to learn in every setting and environment. I realized the importance of this while taking elective classes to reach my degree units. I was taking classes just to fulfill a requirement but I ended up learning more than I ever thought I would through these classes. Now I have knowledge about ancient Rome, women's gender

studies, architecture, and so much more. I have expanded my knowledge past the bubble of English that I was originally in, and it has only helped me in all situations. I will pass this knowledge on to my students and help them realize the importance of taking college classes, even if it is only a few.

I hope to be able to accomplish everything that I have talked about in my first year of teaching, but I do not know if that is actually attainable. I am worried about so much during that first year. Will my students actually like me? Will I understand the curriculum? Will I be able to make my lessons interesting? Will I have to deal with a school shooting? Will one of my students bring drugs or weapons to class? These are all fears of mine, and the sad part is that some of them are not far fetched. There is so much turmoil in our country right now, and it is beginning to affect the lives of these students and it is changing their actions for the worse. This is why there is a large part of me that does not want to work in a lower economic area like East Los Angeles. The background of those students is far from anything that I was raised with, and it scares me to think about the lives that they lead outside of school. I went to a college prep high school with a zero tolerance policy, and I would love to work in a place like that; where teachers are protected and if a student crosses that line, they are expelled. It may sound harsh, but there is a level of accountability that needs to be held in schools with teachers, parents, and students. If someone brings a knife to school, it needs to be dealt with on all levels. Parents need to be brought in, students need to face the consequences of their actions, and teachers need to uphold these standards. Besides those fears though, I know that everything else that scares me can be faced by learning everything I can during my classes and summer teaching experience. I can also visit my high school teachers and ask them for help, it is always a good idea to remain humble

and ask others for help when needed. I have a lot of fears now, but I had even more just a week ago before starting this class, and I have already conquered some of them just through our classroom instruction. I know that I will be able to conquer all of them in time and with experience.

I went to a school where social justice was not a problem, and I think that all schools should implement certain procedures to combat it. My high school combated injustices through their zero tolerance program. If someone was acting in a racist manner, they were expelled because those types of actions and beliefs were not tolerated. Our school was a loving and accepting environment where everyone acted as one family and student body. We also had amazing counselors that were there to help students in need, and every student had to meet with a counselor at least once a month to check in. This way the school could stay on top of any potential problems by meeting with every student before a problem developed. I know that not every school is going to be like this though, there will be times when I am faced with issues that should not be present in a school setting. I will hold my students accountable for their actions, and I will do everything in my power to create a classroom environment that is accepting of all students needs. I will let my students know that I am there for them and I will work with them, but there needs to be a level of commitment on their part as well. I will not pass students that do not complete assignments and this standard will be made clear to them. Everyone will be expected to put in the same level of work in order to pass the class. I will also make it clear to my students that if they need help, all they need to do is ask, but I will not chase them down if they do not want to try. Accountability and respect are key aspects of a well oiled classroom, and I intend to implement them in mine.



This narrative has described me in a nutshell, and it has provided a clear view on who I want to be as a teacher. I am excited for that future to unfold, because I know that if I give it my all, then my students success will be evident.

## **Part B: *Who are my students?***

### **Introduction**

In this Ethnography I will be discussing three different students and their varying ability levels. I will look at their different backgrounds and home environments, their assets and needs, how they interact with other students in a positive and negative way, and finally what I can be doing to benefit these students and work with them. It is important to research students with varying degrees of learning ability and life background in order to truly gain a deeper understanding of how to develop as a professional educator. Each of these students has brought something different to this Ethnography. All of this information paired with research has culminated in an Ethnography that studies the lives of three separate students and discusses how as a teacher, I can work with these students to benefit and encourage them in their specific areas of need.

### **Case Study 1: Sean Rodriguez**

The first student that I am going to be discussing is Sean, an EL student with a wonderful attitude and flowing hair.

#### **Demographic Information**

Sean is 16 years old and currently a senior at Flagstaff High School. Sean is outgoing, hilarious, and full of energy. He is a wonderful student for many reasons, but his bright personality is one of my favorites. Sean has long flowing black hair that he never seems able to

tame, it was one of the first things that I noticed about him. One day at the beginning of the year, Sean asked me for a hair tie which I gladly gave to him. As he tried to tame his unruly hair into a low ponytail, the hair tie snapped and went flying across the room. Sean sighed and stated that “another one bit the dust”, clearly this had happened to him before. Since that day Sean has never had his hair tied back, he lets it flow down to his shoulders or attempts to control it by wearing a baseball cap. Moments like the hair tie incident are not few and far between with Sean, I can always expect him to crack a joke or say something to catch my attention during class, but I know that I can always give Sean a look to bring him back to our lesson. He sees the look, makes a noise, we both laugh, and he continues with his work. Sean and I have also developed a unique handshake that we use every time he passes by my classroom. I shake every student’s hand as they walk in my door and Sean eventually told me that he wanted a special handshake. I allowed him to create something simple yet unique for us, it involves three hand movements and a snap at the end. It is little things like this that make Sean so easy to talk to and get to know on a personal level. I could tell at the beginning of the year that Sean would make a wonderful focus student because he would easily open up for interviews and questions. When I learned that Sean was an EL student I felt even more strongly about picking him as a focus student. Sean was very open to becoming a focus student, he jumped at the chance when I asked him if it would be okay. He even told me that it would be cool to have a paper written about him because no one had ever done that before. Since that day Sean has been one of my biggest supporters when it comes to school because he wants to make sure that I get my assignments done so that I can write about him.

As the semester has progressed, I have learned more about Sean and his family/background. Both of Sean's parents are originally from Mexico and came to the United States speaking barely any English. When Sean was born his parents had only been citizens for about a year so their English was still limited. This meant that Sean grew up in a home where Spanish was the dominant language; he learned English at a slow pace with his parents. When Sean started school he was immediately classified as an EL student. This set him up for struggles in school because he had different classes than his peers and learning English and receiving an education at the same time were incredibly difficult. Sean's family did not give up though, they continued to work on their English and helped Sean to the best of their ability. Later in school Sean was reclassified as an RFEP student, but the brand of EL would always follow him until he walked through my door.

**Assets and Needs: Academic Standing**

When it comes to being classified as an EL student, many people turn up their noses. They think that a student with this classification is not as smart as their peers or will have some type of thick accent. Those people could not be more wrong though, and Sean is the perfect example of that. He is bright, speaks nearly perfect English, and is funny to boot. Sean's EL classification has only hindered him in the slightest, and he is barely behind the rest of his classmates. Sean is currently at a 12th grade reading level, which is extremely rare for students at this high school. I believe that Sean is so proficient in reading because his parents read to him growing up and had him read a lot of books at home; this was one of the ways that they all improved their English. Sean's writing level is a little less than his reading, he is currently writing at the level of a beginning junior in high school. I think his writing level could improve

drastically this year though with some pushing. Sean does not enjoy writing because it is time consuming, so he chooses not to write most of the time. However, I have been pushing Sean to write more and more and to expand on his ideas when he writes. I can already see an improvement in his writing when I compare his current work to that from the beginning of the school year. When it comes to speaking, Sean is very good at expressing his thoughts and ideas; I again believe that this is because he read so much growing up. With Sean's vibrant personality, he does not struggle with raising his hand in class and offering ideas when volunteers are asked for. As a teacher, it is wonderful to have a student that enjoys talking so much in class, in a productive way at that. Listening is another area that Sean could use some work in. He is good at listening when I am talking, but if something funny comes up or a random thought pops into his head, Sean has trouble not voicing those things immediately to his classmates. I have talked with him about saving those thoughts for a later time or even writing them down so that he will not forget them. Sean has started to use the technique of writing down his thoughts, and it has greatly helped him to improve his listening skills.

When it comes to his test taking skills, Sean does well with multiple choice, true/false, or word bank questions. It is obvious then that Sean does not prefer fill in the answer type questions or essays because of his feelings towards writing. However, I still assign these type of tests to Sean because it is important that he continues to work on his writing skills, even if he does not like to use them very often. Sean understands why he has to write and he is slowly coming around to the idea that writing is not the work of the devil. Sean gets nervous when it comes to summative assessments though because he feels like they can make or break his grade. I have told him that I would never assign a project or essay that would kill his grade, but he still gets

nervous when I say the word project. As the semester has gone on Sean has gotten better at calming his nerves by talking it out with me. I help him plan out essay ideas and outline on paper, we also talk about project ideas when I assign them and the brainstorming sessions appear to help Sean greatly.

Group work is an area where Sean really shines on a consistent basis. He absolutely loves getting to bounce ideas off of his peers and work with them to complete tasks. Sean chose a specific group of friends to sit with and that makes it more enjoyable for him to work in a group setting. Sean's group-mates are two boys that were also raised in Spanish speaking homes, a similarity that the boys have and thrive off of. Sometimes when they are all three working together, they break off into Spanish and completely lose me. I do not mind the boys speaking Spanish in class, even if I do not understand them, because I can see that they are getting their work done and I know that it makes Sean comfortable to talk in his first language with people that understand him completely. Overall, Sean is doing extremely well in class and only struggles significantly in areas where he chooses to slack a little bit. With some pushing and talking to I know that Sean can excel at everything that comes his way.

### **Assets and Needs: Socio-Emotional Development and Social Identity**

Social behavior is an interesting area for Sean. He clearly gravitates towards students that have had similar upbringings as him. I do not really see Sean socializing with students that do not speak fluent Spanish. I think that the only reason Sean gravitated towards me was because our personalities are similar and I did not try to squash his personality in class like so many teachers would. Trying to get Sean to talk with other students has been a challenge because he is comfortable with a set group of people and does not want to branch away from them. Now this

does not mean that Sean is not friendly towards everyone, he has no difficulty smiling and being nice to those around him; but I can immediately tell when Sean is being nice vs. genuine, it is obvious to me that he is nice to everyone, but only genuine to those that he has chosen to be in his inner circle of friends. In order to work on this I have specifically designed group tasks where I chose the group members, and I made sure that the group consisted of people that do not normally work together. Initially Sean resisted this idea and he did not complete all of the assigned group tasks because he was upset that he did not get to work with his friends. I warned Sean that this behavior would not benefit him in the end, something that proved true as his grades started to slip. One day after class I asked Sean to stay behind so that we could discuss his grades. I talked with Sean about the idea of working with new people and how that affected him. He opened up to me and explained how he feels about working with new people, how he gets nervous because he does not know them and does not quite trust them. He feels as if they are going to judge him if he cannot complete tasks at their same level because of his EL classification. I have encouraged Sean to believe that this is not true, and as he works with different students in the class on a frequent basis, he is beginning to accept this truth as well.

Sean's social identity is heavily rooted in the fact that he comes from a strong Mexican family. He is very proud of his heritage, as he should be, and he is proud of all that his parents have accomplished as immigrants. Sean is always looking to get involved in areas that promote Mexican heritage and pride, including being a member of the Spanish Club on campus. I constantly encourage Sean to help his classmates that are struggling in their Spanish classes because I know that it will bring a sense of pride and accomplishment to Sean knowing that he used his background for the betterment of others.

**Assets and Needs: Funds of Knowledge**

My home visit with Sean involved only Sean and his mother because his parents are now divorced and his father lives a couple cities away. After class one day I asked Sean if I would be meeting both of his parents during the home visit and Sean sadly replied that I would only be meeting his mother since his parents are divorced; I also got the impression that the parents do not get along very well and that was another reason that the dad would not be present. I previously learned from Sean that both of his parents were high school graduates, but only his mom completed college. It is clear to me that Sean is proud of his mother for finishing school and wishes that his father had as well instead of dropping out to start working. When I arrived at the home Sean's mother greeted me warmly and invited me inside. She set us up at the kitchen table and told Sean to go finish his homework. Sean reluctantly left the room, I could tell that he wanted to be present for the conversation. I started off by asking Sean's mom to tell me a little bit more about Sean; what was he like growing up, was he always the same in school, etc. She told me that growing up Sean refused to speak English, he was determined to speak Spanish everywhere he went. When he started school it became a problem however because Sean's parents wanted him to speak English in school and learn the language better, but Sean only wanted to speak Spanish. Sean's parents had to tell him that he could speak Spanish at home and with his friends, but that school was a time for speaking English and he needed to do that. This told me that Sean's love for his culture and family background has always been present and strong within him. Sean's mom went on to tell me that she thinks Sean is a strong person and student, but that he does not try as hard as he could in class. I noticed that we both thought the same thing when it comes to how hard Sean tries in class. She also told me that she is happy that

Sean plays sports at school because it keeps him out of trouble. She does not want Sean to be wandering the streets or hanging out with bad people, and sports seem to be a good alternative. Being on the basketball team forces Sean to stay at school instead of going home because he has practice shortly after school ends. Sean's mom also informed me that she has Sean going to tutoring three times a week before Basketball practice in order to ensure that his grades stay up. She believes in school first before sports or anything else, so if Sean wants to stay on the team, he has to show his mom that he can handle it while maintaining good grades. Sean's mom values his education and the importance of graduating with good grades. She wants Sean to go to college and she knows that if he lets his grades slip, he will not get into a good school. It is clear that Sean's mom has a vision for Sean's future, and it includes him graduating college and making something of himself. I thoroughly enjoyed meeting Sean's mom, she is a wonderful person who was so easy to talk with. She thinks the world of her son and only wants the best for him. I agreed to keep in contact with her over email to inform her of Sean's progress with his grades and to also let her know if there are any changes with sports, attitude, or anything else. I appreciate how involved she is in her child's education, it is refreshing to see a parent that wants the world for their child, but knows that education cannot come at the cost of sports or leisure activities.

### **Assets and Needs: Experiences, Interests, and Developmental Considerations**

About three days after the home visit I interviewed Sean to get to know him and his goals a little bit better. We started off by talking about the home visit, Sean wanted to know what his mom had asked, what she said about him, if I liked their house, etc. It was a typical moment where a child is out of the loop and wants to be brought back in. I told Sean that I had a



wonderful conversation with his mother and that he did not need to worry, we did not talk about his grades or anything like that. Sean visibly relaxed after I told him this and we began talking about him instead. We started by talking about basketball and how Sean likes the new coach. I was surprised to learn that Sean does not like the new coach at all and is actually thinking of quitting the team. Sean told me that the new coach is condescending and rude to a lot of the players. Apparently this coach also plays students from a previous school more than the boys from Flagstaff. The new coach took a job at Flagstaff and some of the students from his previous school transferred to Flagstaff to continue playing for him. This does not sit well with a lot of the Flagstaff boys since they are not seeing a lot of playing time and they have been attending this school and playing Basketball for four years. I can understand why Sean is frustrated but I encouraged him to either talk with the coach about this or the Athletic Director instead of just quitting; Sean said he would think about it.

Next I asked Sean about his personal goals and career goals, the answers to both surprised me. For his personal goals, Sean wants to graduate college, get a masters degree, and move to another state to work. I had no idea that Sean was even remotely interested in a masters degree and I also did not know that he wanted to move to another state. Now I can talk with Sean about the requirements for a masters degree and steer him towards that course. For his career goals, Sean has two things in mind but they are both on the same track. Sean wants to become either a Math or English teacher, one of which I was very proud of and excited about. I told Sean that those are two very different fields of study and that he should spend the rest of his senior year figuring out which subject he prefers and could see himself teaching for awhile. Sean also told me that wherever he teaches, he would like to be involved in some sort of Spanish club or

group so that he can continue to spread his culture and be involved with that aspect of his life. Sean is proud of that background and attributes his pride to his parents, because even though they are now divorced, they spent a great part of Sean's life together instilling values and ideas in him that were derived from their heritage.

It was wonderful to sit and talk with Sean about his future goals and plans, I am extremely happy that he wants to become a teacher and pursue his masters degree. I know that Sean can achieve all of these things with the right amount of push, drive, and dedication.

### **Action Plan**

In order to help Sean continue to do his best and maintain his grades at school I will do a couple of things. First I am going to email Sean's mom every two weeks to update her on Sean's progress in class. This will help keep Sean accountable for his studies because he knows that his mother and I will be in frequent contact. Secondly I am going to keep putting Sean in different groups of students in class because this will encourage him to socialize with other students and begin to see that he can be genuine with people outside of his chosen group. All of these things combined will help Sean to improve who he is as a person and how he interacts with others in various settings. I am also going to be meeting with Sean every two to three weeks to discuss how he feels about our class dynamic and how he is feeling about working with a wide variety of students. I hope that by conducting these meetings Sean will be able to express how he feels in an honest and open manner, which will truly help me see how he is progressing and what I can be doing to support him. By working in unison with Sean, his mom, and myself, all on one team, I know that Sean will continue to improve his communication with other students and his ability to write as well as he does everything else.

## **Case Study 2: Sarah**

The next student that I am going to be discussing is my Focus Student #2, Sarah, who is an advanced student and would qualify for a GATE program.

### **Demographic Information**

Sarah is 18 years old and currently attends Flagstaff High School in Arizona. Sarah is short, spunky, and a senior. She is loud and outgoing, which makes her fun to have in class. Sarah is very talkative when it comes to her personal life; she has no problem sharing her life story or current struggles with anyone she meets. One important fact from her life story is that Sarah is a foster child. She is originally from Alabama, where she was born into a loving home. Unfortunately Sarah's parents were involved with drugs and they started down a dangerous path that a child should not be on. Child Protective Services were involved with the family multiple times until eventually Sarah was removed from the home and placed in the foster system. Sarah did not understand why this was happening to her at first. She knew that her parents loved her and provided for her, so why was she being taken away from them? This event began to develop anger problems in Sarah, something that she is still battling as a senior. Sarah was tossed around from home to home for years, constantly being uprooted and shifted into another family's home. This process continued for quite some time until finally Sarah was legally adopted by her Aunt and Uncle who lived in Arizona. Sarah was happy to finally be adopted, but she was nervous about moving to a completely different side of the country. She was so used to the states that surrounded her and Arizona was far away from everything she knew. Leaving her friends and almost everything else behind, Sarah boarded a plane with her Aunt and Uncle and left for Arizona, the state that she still resides in today.

While Sarah's early years may have been rough and tumultuous, they shaped her into the young lady that she is today, something that she admits she would never want to change. Sarah learned something from every home she lived in, and she became a stronger person every time she had to move to a new one. Once Sarah finally ended up in her forever home she was able to get comfortable and develop even further as a person. She started attending the same school regularly which enabled her to develop friendships, some of which she still has to this day. Another positive outcome was Sarah's ability to start thriving in school. She had always been smart, but it was difficult for her to ever develop further mentally because she was switching schools so much. Sarah's teachers began to notice her intelligence about halfway through Freshman year. Sarah would constantly finish assignments in record time, and they were always done perfectly. Unfortunately Sarah's teachers did not push her as hard as they should have, her class time was effectively being wasted. This was one of the reasons why I chose Sarah as a focus student. I could tell during the second week of school that she would be a challenge to work with because if she finished her assignments early, she distracted those around her. I looked forward to the challenge of rising to meet Sarah's needs and so far, I have not been disappointed in working with her.

**Assets and Needs: Academic Standing**

At a different High School, Sarah would be classified as a GATE student, and she would be placed into faster paced classes. Unfortunately, Flagstaff High School does not have a specialized GATE program but they do offer Honors and AP classes in all subjects. Sarah has taken some of these classes, but she prefers to stay in regular classes with her friends. The downside here is that Sarah's teachers have not always recognized her advanced status and

therefore she is not pushed. Sarah could have easily continued along that route in my class, but I noticed that she needed to be pushed more than her classmates. It was an interesting challenge at first to get Sarah to realize that she could not put down her classmates, or make rude comments, if they did not understand material right away. There was one class session where we were analyzing lines of poetry and Sarah understood the concepts I was explaining immediately. When I asked a student a question about the poem they sat and thought about it for a minute. Before that student could answer though, Sarah said, “It’s seriously not that hard”. She did this multiple times during that class session which prompted me to pull her aside towards the end of class and talk with her. I explained to Sarah that it was not okay to say those things out loud, even if she believed they were true. We talked about the fact that she is extremely smart and understands concepts quickly, but that it did not give her the right to make her classmates feel dumb or slow. She understood that she should not say everything that popped into her head, although she still mumbles it under her breath at times.

In order to work with Sarah and maximize her potential, I have started giving her longer writing tasks, more complex assignments, and tasks to complete. Sarah does not always want to spend her entire class time completing more work than other students. Sometimes she just wants to be like everyone else and complete their assignments with no additions or changes made. I have agreed to allow this because I do understand that Sarah is still just a kid and sometimes she wants to have fun and talk with friends after she gets her work done. I believe that this is a good compromise because for the most part, Sarah is still being challenged and pushed but she is also allowed to feel like a “regular” student that is not treated differently than others.

When it comes to tests, Sarah passes with ease. Unfortunately most of the exams for our class were created by the department head over the summer, and she does not like them being changed. This allows Sarah to get amazing grades on all of her tests because they are too easy for her. They are not challenging her or causing her to think very much, she breezes through every exam and assessment and then comes to sit at my desk so that she is not tempted to talk to those around her. When it comes to regular class work, Sarah does best when she is working by herself. There are times when I allow students to work on assignments together, but when Sarah works in a group she tends to complete everything for the entire group and then let them copy it onto their own pages. I know that Sarah's intentions are not to cheat or be dishonest, she just gets bored when her group members are taking too long. For this reason I allow Sarah to come to my desk and complete her work; that way she is not distracting anyone else or completing work for other students. However, Sarah does work in groups when I assign long term projects, like presentations or reports. To combat her natural instinct to complete everything herself, I assign roles for each group member and tasks that each member must complete. This gives every group member a specific task to complete and ensures that Sarah does not take on all of the tasks herself.

English is not a difficult subject area for Sarah so she really does not have difficulties in my class except for completing the work of everyone around her. Grade wise she has over 100% because she not only completes every regular assignment, but she takes on every opportunity for extra credit as well. I am constantly amazed by Sarah's ability to take a difficult task and complete it with ease, I know that this skill will greatly benefit her in the future whether during college or when she holds a job.

**Assets and Needs: Socio-Emotional Development and Social Identity**

Because of Sarah's constant movement from home to home, she has trouble developing new friendships. She easily maintains her old ones because she developed those at a younger and more innocent age. Now that she is older, Sarah has developed jaded views of relationships and does not trust new people that come into her life. She has trouble forming lasting relationships and she looks for attention in all the wrong areas. If someone slights Sarah in any way she tends to yell at them and harbor anger towards them. Sarah also has an attitude about a mile wide that is apparent to everyone around her; she can be slightly passive aggressive with her comments towards others and her tone can also be biting at times. Sarah had an attitude with me at first, but she came to realize that I was there for her and that I would not just walk out of her life at any moment. I am a teacher that she can rely on to be there and support her. This has changed not only Sarah's relationship with me, but it is beginning to change how she interacts with others around her. Sarah is slowly learning how to trust others and open up to them, although it is definitely a slow process. To help Sarah with the ability to form relationships I have had honest conversations with her about how her words and attitude affect those around her. I have given her examples from class and she responded well to this. I also introduced Sarah to more of her classmates that she did not know that well. She has at least two more friends in our class, people that she likes to sit next to and talk with.

Another difficulty that Sarah faces is her own self confidence. She wants to become a model someday but she is constantly putting herself down. Sarah thinks she is too short and too ugly to be a model. In reality she is a beautiful young lady with a very promising future, but she has to believe that herself in order to achieve it. This also plays into her ability to develop

relationships because she does not understand how anyone could like her since she believes that she is ugly. One thing that has helped Sarah change this perception about herself is our Social Emotional Learning activities on Thursdays. Every now and then we do Affirmation Thursday where students have to say positive and uplifting comments about one another. The students also have to write affirmation notes to each other. I have seen multiple students write notes to Sarah and I have written one to her as well. These notes have begun to change the way that Sarah looks at herself. She is starting to believe the positive things that others say about her, and that shows a great amount of growth in a short time. I know that Sarah will only continue to grow in this area as the year progresses.

#### **Assets and Needs: Funds of Knowledge**

I was excited to meet Sarah's family during the home visit, but I was nervous as well since Sarah has mixed feelings about them. When I arrived at the home I was greeted by Sarah's aunt and uncle, but she refers to them as her parents at all times. They were both extremely cordial and easy to talk with. They were very open about Sarah's past with her birth parents and all of the homes she was shuffled in and out of. I could tell early on that this would be an easy interview to conduct, I would not have to pull information out of them or ask guiding questions; all of which was proved to be true as the interview continued. Sarah's parents even gave me a tour of their home, which is extremely lovely. It is a two story brick house with a lovely front yard full of various plants. Sarah did not want her parents to show me her room because it was apparently extremely messy. I did not mind this at all, but poor Sarah was so worried that I would see it and think differently about her. I assured her that my room at home is extremely messy as well, which she did not believe at first since my classroom is so neat and organized.



Sarah's parents keep their house neat and tidy, it was obvious that they take great pride in owning their home and keeping it well maintained. I can understand why Sarah does not talk about where she lives in class though. Her house is situated in a more affluent area than most of her classmates. I can understand that she does not want to be judged or looked at differently by her peers just because of where she lives.

During this visit I also learned more about Sarah's parents and their general backgrounds. They met when they were in high school, which I thought was extremely adorable. They got married after college and wanted to start their own family; they have two daughters that are older than Sarah. One has graduated college and is starting her own family, the other is just about to finish college. Sarah has briefly mentioned her two sisters, but she does not talk extensively about them so I did not know what they were doing in life. Sarah's parents gladly adopted her and were excited to bring a new member into their family. They told me that Sarah was extremely closed off when she first arrived to live with them. She did not want to open up and trust them because everyone else in her life had pushed her off on someone else. Sarah soon opened up to them and trusted them more and more. Once that happened, her parents were able to see how smart she was and they started to push her more and more. Even though Sarah's teachers did not always push or challenge her, her parents tried their best to help her reach her maximum potential.

It was clear during the interview that Sarah's parents value and appreciate the education she is receiving at school. They like most of her teachers and it was clear that Sarah has talked about me a lot based on their comments. It was refreshing to hear parents talk so positively about school, especially during a time when it seems like the teacher is always wrong. Sarah's parents

encouraged me to keep pushing her and challenging her, even if it seems like she is getting annoyed. They know that her education is valuable and they want her to succeed, and the only way that will happen is if she is constantly being pushed to the next level.

### **Assets and Needs: Experiences, Interests, and Developmental Considerations**

I interviewed Sarah a couple days after the home visit so that it would all still be fresh. Sarah started off by asking me how I liked her house and her parents; it was clear that she was looking for confirmation from me that her house and parents are nice. I told her that I had a wonderful time and enjoyed meeting her family, they seemed like very nice people. I started off by asking Sarah basic questions about her future and her goals. She told me about her dream to be a model and how she has wanted that since she was little. She said that she would put on nice clothes and strut up and down the hallway of her house, pretending that it was her personal fashion runway. I enjoyed hearing about this, it made me smile to think of a young Sarah walking around her house like a grown adult on a catwalk. Sarah surprised me though by saying that she is also interested in joining the army after graduation. This came as a complete surprise to me since Sarah has only ever talked about modeling. She informed me that when we had an Army Recruiter come to our class it really affected her and made her think about the options that the army can offer. I encouraged her to research this choice and make sure that it was truly something that she was interested in because once you join the armed forces you cannot easily back out of it. Sarah agreed with this and promised to look further into this decision to see if she truly wanted to do it.

Next Sarah told me about her childhood and how it affected her in school. She said that growing up her grades suffered because she was constantly changing schools. She did not want

to try hard in any of her classes because she knew that eventually she would just have to leave. Once she started school in Flagstaff though Sarah began to change her conceptions about education. She realized that by bombing her classes she was only hurting herself and her future, no one else. This began to change her attitude about attending classes and actually trying in them. Now as a senior, Sarah appreciates her teachers and values her education; she tries her hardest in every class and wants to excel.

### **Action Plan**

In order to continue pushing Sarah to do her best there are a couple of things that I need to do. First I have to continue to give Sarah more challenging tasks to complete so that she is not bored in class and is pushed to the right level. I also need to contact Sarah's other teachers to talk with them about the level of work that she can handle. If Sarah is not being pushed in all of her classes then she will continue to skate by and fly under the radar. She will not achieve the level of greatness that I know she could be at. Sarah's parents have already told me that they are supportive of me continuing to push her, and they are also encouraged by the fact that I am willing to contact her other teachers. We already have a plan to talk again about Sarah's progress at the end of December. They would like monthly updates about her progress and they said that a simple email is fine. Sarah knows that she will continue to be pushed in all of her classes, something that she was not entirely happy about at first, but with guidance from her parents and myself, she realized that it is best for her to be challenged.

In order to support Sarah's emotional development and encourage her to foster relationships, I will continue with our Thursday activities and I will talk with Sarah about how she is feeling about these friendships. When all of this is put together I believe that Sarah will be

able to develop relationships that are longer lasting and are truly beneficial for her. I will also encourage Sarah to push herself further on assignments, including giving her further tasks to complete and more difficult prompts to answer. I know that Sarah will be able to achieve as an advanced student with this action plan in place.

### **Case Study 3: Taylor**

My final focus student is Taylor who is a student with a significant life experience.

#### **Demographic Information**

Taylor is eighteen years old and currently lives in Flagstaff, Arizona. He is a senior at Flagstaff High School. Taylor has a very large family which mainly comes from his parents being divorced. Taylor's dad lives in a nearby city with Taylor's stepmom and four children. While he enjoys visiting his dad and stepmom, it is difficult because he plays sports, and those visits prevent him from traveling on weekends. Taylor's mom has a girlfriend and together they share five children, Taylor being one of them. He is the oldest out of all his siblings and only shares one sibling fully with his mom and dad. Taylor is passionate about many sports, but he currently plays football for his high school. He is shorter than most of the guys on the team, but his coach says that he has the most heart for the game. Taylor's heart for sports allows him to compete to his fullest in every game and enjoy himself while he is at it. Taylor comes from a strong Mexican family that upholds values such as family time, good grades, and healthy living. The area where Taylor lives is rife with drugs, but he is not involved with that. Taylor's mom put him in baseball at a young age in order to keep him busy and away from the drugs in the neighborhood. This was a decision that ultimately led to Taylor playing various sports in high school, keeping good grades, and remaining drug free. Even though Taylor's mom kept him out

of the drug culture, she could not protect him from everything, and this is the main reason that I chose Taylor as a focus student. Taylor's family was homeless for about one year while Taylor was transitioning from eighth grade to high school. This traumatic/significant life event shaped Taylor's view of the world and inspired him to always do his best in school so that he could achieve great things someday. Taylor's mom went through a difficult time when she and her husband got divorced. She was suddenly down to one income and then the economy tanked. She lost her job and could not afford to pay rent any longer. This resulted in Taylor, Taylor's younger brother, and Taylor's mom living in their car at a park near the high school. No one knew that Taylor was homeless during this time, the family kept it very private. They managed to wash their clothes and remain in school, which was probably their saving grace. Life turned around for this family when Taylor's mom got a job at a local store and met her significant other. Soon the family moved into an apartment complex where the mom's significant other lived. Both families pooled resources and rented a second apartment so that everyone could be together. In this complex is Taylor, his younger brother, mom, stepmom, grandma, and three younger siblings. Taylor lives in one apartment with his grandma and younger brother while the rest of the family lives in the second apartment. Taylor enjoys having a home again, and he especially enjoys having a large chunk of his family in one location.

Being homeless changed the way that Taylor looked at school. He was never a bad student, but he did not try his hardest in class and his grades were average. Homelessness brought Taylor to the realization that if he did not get a good paying job someday, he could end up back on the streets with nothing to his name. Taylor decided to start working hard in class to get better grades and hopefully get accepted into college. Taylor is currently on the right track to

make his dream of going to college happen. He works hard in all of his classes and he continues to excel in sports and extracurricular activities. That is one of Taylor's great strengths, his ability to multi-task and remain on top of everything he sets his mind to. This benefits Taylor when it comes to school work and also maintaining relationships with family and friends during such a busy season of life. However, Taylor has specific strengths when it comes to school such as completing every assignment on time no matter the difficulty level or time needed to complete it. Taylor will always get his work done, a trait that is admired by his many teachers. If Taylor receives an assignment and he does not understand it, he will immediately ask for help and get it done to the best of his ability. Taylor does not let hard work in the classroom stop him from turning in assignments. He will work as hard as he can and ask for help when needed, and he will always get it done. Just this past week, Taylor had a vision board due for my class. It took up a lot of his time and it was especially difficult because the football team made playoffs. Taylor did not let any of this stop him though. He completed his vision board, presented it to the class, and received a high A on the assignment. I know that as the school year progresses and Taylor gets busier, he will still complete every assignment to the best of his ability. Taylor also has many strengths outside of the classroom; such as being a strong friend and role model to everyone around him. Taylor is always there for his friends, no matter what. He will always lift them up, guide them, cheer for them, push them forward, and help them excel at everything. Taylor is the type of friend that would stop everything if someone needed him. You can always find Taylor on campus hanging out with his friends and encouraging them in some way. He is great at lifting others up and supporting them in various tasks, but mainly in school work. Taylor also supports his friends by attending their sports games. Taylor can be found in the gym supporting the

volleyball team, on the field cheering for cross country/track, or on the pool deck/in the water helping with water polo. Taylor's friends describe him as a well rounded individual that is easy to talk to, caring, outgoing, funny, and supportive. They all know that no matter what happens to them, they can always count on Taylor to pick up the phone, or show up at their house, to help them out during good and bad times. This behavior is also evident in the classroom where Taylor is constantly asking others if they need help once his own work is finished. Taylor does not just sit at his desk and play on his phone, he checks on his table mates and the surrounding groups to see if anyone needs a helping hand at their work. Taylor will never complete someone's assignment for them, but he will always encourage them and try to explain the concepts as best as he can.

Although Taylor has many strengths, he also has areas where he can experience some growth. Taylor needs to work on pushing himself past his limits in the classroom. He knows where his abilities lie and he does not generally try and push past them or challenge himself academically. It takes a teacher or another classmate to encourage Taylor to go beyond his comfort level. Taylor has not developed the drive and motivation to challenge himself quite yet. As a senior, I had hoped that he would already possess this in spades, but it is not quite at the level that I would like. Taylor needs to be challenged so that he can see how capable he is of completing more difficult tasks. Outside of the classroom Taylor needs to work on his time management and organizational skills. Taylor participates in many different activities, but he does not always plan out his time very well. He may have to rush from home to school, or vice versa, if he got caught up in an activity and forgot to watch the time. This also affects Taylor's organizational skills because he frequently double books himself or shows up for activities on the

wrong day. He is constantly running from one place to the next, but he needs to take the time to slow down and organize his schedule better. If he kept track of time, and possibly kept a planner, he would be able to complete all of his activities in a timely manner, never feel rushed, and he would always be at the right place at the right time, never a day early or late again. If Taylor works on these areas of growth, there is no telling what he could be capable of. His strengths would far outweigh his areas of growth, and he would be heading into college a better student, athlete, and overall well rounded person.

**Assets and Needs: Academic Standing**

Many would assume that Taylor has difficulty learning because he is a student with a significant life experience, but that is not the case at all. Taylor's proficiency in reading and writing vary, but overall he is an exceptional student. When it comes to reading, Taylor is extremely capable. He can read at a twelfth grade level or even slightly higher in some circumstances. He can process in depth articles in class and get to the root of the words and their meaning. However, he does not always enjoy reading, it is more of a task for him than anything else. He will read in class because it is necessary, but he will not read for fun. Taylor admitted to me that the last time he actually read a book for fun was over a year and a half ago. He felt like there was more reading happening in school, and it started to take the fun out of reading when he got home. Unfortunately, this absence of reading outside of school has started to affect Taylor's writing; he can write at about a tenth grade level, as a senior in high school. Taylor may recognize higher level words in readings, but he has not mastered the ability to use those words in his writing. He tends to stick with simple words that can be easily written and understood. He does not go in depth with his writing, his answers are very surface level and most of the time he



is just giving summaries or basic information. There are times when Taylor also misspells words and does not catch those mistakes. At times I wonder though if this is because he does not know how to spell them or if it is because he is trying to work too fast and therefore makes simple mistakes when it comes to spelling. Taylor's speaking and listening level is different from his reading and writing ability. He is able to listen to everything going on around him and he can process all of it at a quick pace. He is able to multitask and focus on the teacher even if his phone or laptop is causing some sort of distraction. I have not told Taylor to put away his electronic devices because I can tell that they help him focus; he is the type of person that needs to stimulate his hands as he is listening. Speaking is a different area for Taylor though, he gets extremely nervous when he talks in front of his classmates. Taylor feels insecure about his ideas and thoughts, he is afraid that he won't sound smart or that others will judge him. This causes Taylor to keep most of his ideas to himself or only share when called upon, and even then he is reluctant. If a teacher is one-on-one with Taylor, he has so much more to say. He will expand on every question and talk non-stop about a subject. He is an extremely bright student and loves to talk, but his fear of being judged or sounding dumb in front of others has caused him to stop volunteering his thoughts and ideas during class time. Taylor also had to struggle early in school because many teachers assumed that he did not speak English well because of his ethnicity and his shyness paired together. Taylor would not talk a lot in class and teachers equated this to a language barrier. He grew up being frustrated that teachers assumed so much about him, and that also played a part in him getting quieter and quieter in class. During our short time together, I have slowly brought Taylor more and more out of his shell by encouraging him to read out loud and answer in class occasionally, but it saddens me that so many teachers put him in the place

where he is currently at. Hopefully, I can continue to change his ideas about talking and volunteering his ideas during class so that when he gets to college, he is able to fully and actively participate in discussions. While Taylor's life experiences have not directly affected his learning, they have affected how much emotional support he needs. Taylor's parent's divorce, being homeless, and dealing with so many siblings has thrown him for loops time and time again. Emotionally Taylor needs consistency in all areas of life. He needs to feel supported in all areas of school because it makes him feel like someone in an adult position is a constant. That is why I attended every home football game, to show Taylor that he could rely on me to be a constant source of support and guidance, especially because his parents didn't always show it. They would come to football games, but they would never sit together and they would not approach Taylor at the same time. Taylor would have to spend double the time of everyone else with his family because he had to see them separately. Emotionally this was difficult for him because he was trying to focus on the game, but he knew that his family was there, watching from separate areas. This also affects Taylor as the week goes on because he has to figure out which house he is going to spend his weekend at. He has to look at his entire schedule and determine whether or not he can go to his dad's house, which means he won't be near his mom for the entire weekend. If he has a sports game or activity/practice, he won't be able to see his dad because his mom lives near the school not his dad. This does not upset Taylor's mom, but it upsets Taylor because he wants to spend equal time with his parents, and unfortunately it is not always possible.

**Assets and Needs: Socio-Emotional Development and Social Identity**

When it comes to behavior and social needs, Taylor is actually doing exceptionally well! Coming from a rough background helped Taylor develop a better understanding of the needs and

wants of those around him. When a student is going through a difficult time they can always count on Taylor to be there for them. He is great at listening to others and providing advice when needed. Many students at the school appreciate and respect Taylor, even if he doesn't always realize it. Taylor may be great at recognizing needs in others, but he does not recognize his own needs or emotions for the most part. He is constantly holding in all negative emotions and only expressing happy ones. Taylor supports everyone around him, but he fails to recognize his own need for support. If he is having a bad day, he just shuts down and doesn't talk to most people.

I have talked with Taylor about this and he is slowly starting to realize that he cannot push others away when they want to help him, just as he has helped them. In order to work on this, I have started dedicating Thursday's class time to social-emotional learning. Students work in a large group setting and share different emotions and thoughts based on prompting questions provided by the teacher. At first, Taylor was hesitant to participate in these activities, he did not want to open up and share details of his life with the other students. Over the last few weeks, Taylor has slowly opened up more and he is now sharing almost the same amount as everyone else in the class. It is tremendous to watch this student open up to those around him and begin trusting others. These Thursday activities have promoted self-awareness and openness to all students by creating a safe environment where students know that they can speak freely without any fear or worry. Every student is beginning to share more details about their lives and trust one another with this information.

### **Assets and Needs: Funds of Knowledge**

When I arrived at Taylor's house for the home visit, I was extremely nervous. I had seen his mom at various football games and she always intimidated me. Taylor's younger brother

greeted me outside their apartment and showed me inside. Their mom was clearly nervous about the meeting, she had a hard time making eye contact at first and did not know where to sit down. We settled on the kitchen table and I made sure to smile and try to be as relaxed as possible. At first when I began asking questions the mom only gave one word responses. I could tell that I would need to do some prompting before I would receive full answers. After we had been talking for some time, she began to give me deeper responses and tell me more about Taylor. I found out that she had started to attend Jr. College, but dropped out when her mom told her that she couldn't accomplish her dreams. Taylor's mom wanted to become a correctional officer, she was fully on her way to accomplishing that, but her own mother told her that she was too short to do that and she would never get hired. This caused her to drop out of school and never receive her degree. I could tell that Taylor's mom still regrets this decision to this day. She told me that all she wants for Taylor is for him to finish school and go for his dreams. She does not want him to look back on his life and regret his decisions or wish he had tried harder. It was very inspiring to hear Taylor's mom talk about her son in this way, it is obvious that she truly cares about his well being. It was also very clear that Taylor's mom appreciates and values his education. She wants him in class every day and she wants him to work his hardest to maintain his grades. She told me that Taylor is slightly bored with some of his classes this year, and that is why his grades are slipping in those classes. But she also said that it is not an excuse for Taylor to not try his hardest and receive good marks. It was refreshing, as a teacher, to hear a parent talk so positively about school and support their child's education so fervently. I was extremely happy once this home visit concluded. I felt like I had learned so much about the student and gained a deeper

understanding about where Taylor comes from and what makes him unique. Now I can definitely see where the different parts of Taylor's personality come from, he is so much like his mom.

### **Assets and Needs: Experiences, Interests, and Developmental Considerations**

The day after I conducted the home interview I sat down with Taylor and interviewed him. He was just like his mom at first, nervous and clearly uncomfortable. He even admitted to me that he does not like being interviewed, it makes him feel like he's being questioned or interrogated. I encouraged Taylor that I was not looking to find out anything wrong about him or trip him up, I simply wanted to find out more about him. I made a couple jokes to ease the tension before I started the actual interview. During the interview I found out a lot about Taylor that I did not previously know. He wants to become either an astronomer or archaeologist. He loves looking at the stars, so the idea of getting to study them for a living is amazing to him. Taylor said that if that doesn't work out, being an archaeologist would be fun because he loves history and finding new buildings and artifacts sounds cool. I encouraged Taylor to find a college that offers majors for these jobs because he clearly wants to seek out a job doing something he loves. I also found out that Taylor's biggest dream is to become a professional basketball player, he wants to play for the NBA. If I had to guess, I would say that Taylor wants to play for the Lakers based on his jersey that he occasionally wears to class. This is Taylor's number one dream, but he does not know if he can do it because of his height. Taylor is slightly shorter than your average high school boy, and this deters him from going full force into making his NBA dream a reality. I don't know if Taylor will actually make this a reality, but I encouraged him to keep trying his hardest and to play basketball in college. It is clear to me that Taylor is going to

make something of himself, whether that is through the MBA or by studying the stars. I can tell that his work ethic and dedication will carry him far in life.

### **Action Plan**

Overall, Taylor is a well rounded student. He has not let his difficult past affect how he interacts with others for the most part, and he continues to excel in school most likely as a result of his life difficulties. However, there is always room for improvement and in Taylor's case the improvement could be made in how he interacts with our class material. If he does not raise his hand to ask questions or clarify, he will never truly understand the material. The best way for me to help Taylor in this area is to continue encouraging and praising him when he does volunteer to read/discuss material in class, and continue to push the boundaries on our Thursday activities. All of this combined will surely help Taylor open up and feel more comfortable speaking out loud in front of his peers. My latest idea was to develop affirmation bags so that the students can write positive and encouraging notes to one another and drop them in the bag. As Taylor receives encouraging and uplifting notes from his classmates, I know that he will be more willing to share his thoughts and ideas in front of them. One of our recent projects, a vision board, helped with this tremendously. Taylor had to present his future goals in front of the entire class, and I know that was not something that he was entirely comfortable with. I was proud of him for taking this project and completing it, but also for sharing his passions with the class; I know it was frightening for him to be vulnerable in front of so many people. As the year progresses, I will call on Taylor more frequently to share, and I will meet with him outside of our class time to see how he is feeling about opening up. I will also begin to incorporate more group work into our class dynamic so that Taylor, and all of my students, have the opportunity to get to know one

another better and work with a wide variety of people. I will make sure to let Taylor know how he is doing and I will also let him know what areas he still needs to work on. So far, I am pleased with his progress as a student and I can't wait to see how his potential grows and expands as the year progresses.

### **Concluding Thoughts on Case Studies**

While all three of these focus students are different in many ways they also have similar qualities that tie them together. Working with these three students has taught me a lot about what it takes to be a well rounded teacher. It takes a lot of practice to be able to work with students of varying ability levels. I have gained a lot of knowledge about creating a safe environment for all of my students, no matter what their ability level is or comfortability with other students. I have listened to every one of my students and taken their feelings and ideas into account when I am creating lessons. I have also learned more about how to create positive interactions between students by engaging them in social emotional learning activities every Thursday. My students are encouraged to open up and share their thoughts and feelings during these activities, but they are not pushed. I have shared my thoughts and feelings with the students in order to show them that it is truly a safe and positive environment where they can learn. Through all of this students who were reluctant to share have now started opening up to their classmates. Researching during class, working hands on with students, and discussing different strategies with others has truly helped me to develop as a professional educator and become the best teacher possible for all of my students.

### **Part C: *What is happening in my community, school, and classroom?***

#### **Micro-Community Research**

Banning California is a respectively small town for Southern California situated alongside the 10 freeway about twenty minutes from Palm Springs. It sits right in the middle of the San Gorgonio Pass so it is extremely windy at all times of the day. As you are driving along the 10 freeway, you might miss Banning because it only comprises about four freeway exits, but the town's boundaries stretch further north and south than they do east and west. It is situated in Riverside County, which automatically sets an appeal for tax purposes sitting at a lower rate than Los Angeles County. The city is approximately 23 square land miles and zero water area (World Media Group, 2019). Banning is not compromised of tall skyscrapers filled with offices and CEOs, it boasts a much smaller appeal, a humble one. The people of Banning are humble as well, you will not see them driving flashy cars, adorning their properties with luxury items, or wearing the newest and hottest trends; but that is what makes Banning so unique, its' commitment to remaining a small town with historical feels.

Banning's population sits roughly around 30,000 people, which is why it is considered a small town, for Southern California that is. It ranks number 256 in terms of population sizes for all of California (World Media Group, 2019). The population of Banning has grown almost thirty percent since 2000, which constitutes a higher growth rate than the state average of twelve percent, and much higher than the national growth rate of eleven percent (World Media Group, 2019). "The population density is about one thousand three hundred and ten people per square mile, higher than the state and national averages" (World Media Group, 2019). The largest race represented in Banning is white, making up about seventy-two percent of the total population.



Many other races make up the demographics of Banning including “Hispanic- thirty-nine percent, Black- eight percent, Asian- five percent, and Native American- just over one percent” (World Media Group, 2019). Although Native Americans only make up just over one percent of Banning’s population, you would not think that when you spend time in the area because you see a lot of Native American people around the city. This is largely because of the reservation land that surrounds Banning on various sides. The Morongo Indian Reservation is a rather large piece of land, estimating over 35,000 acres (morongonation.org, 2019). Within the Hispanic population about “eighty-seven percent are Mexican, three percent Central America, and two percent Cuban; the Asian population is comprised primarily of Chinese and Japanese backgrounds” (World Media Group, 2019). A wonderful fact about the people of Banning is that “around eighty-nine percent of the people living there claim that their ancestors were some of the first inhabitants of Banning,” this provides for a very rich and deeply rooted historical pride among the people (World Media Group, 2019). Out of these various races and backgrounds, the main language spoken in Banning is English but “thirty-one percent of the population speak a language other than English” (Hidalgo, 2018).

For gender purposes, Banning is almost split exactly down the middle with “males comprising forty-seven percent and females at fifty-two percent” (World Media Group, 2019). The median age in Banning is forty-five years old, but “ages sixty-five to eighty-five and over make up a little over twenty-six percent of the total population” (World Media Group, 2019).

The population in Banning is diverse when it comes to education levels with “nineteen percent having less than a high school degree, thirty-three percent high school graduate, thirty-one percent hold some college, nine percent hold a bachelor’s degree, and six percent have

a masters degree or another form of higher education” (World Media Group, 2019). It is alarming that at least nineteen percent of the population did not finish high school, this speaks volumes to the way that current students are going to feel about education. The average high school enrollment is around ninety-four percent which is good, but I believe that one hundred percent of the students in the area should be enrolled in school. “As of 2014 eighty-three percent of the student population were attending college and sixty-one percent were attending graduate school or beyond” (World Media Group, 2019). Those numbers are more promising for the future of Banning and they boast a higher level of achievement for the community as a whole. The average household size in Banning is two to three people, and if each of those children living in the household attended high school and went on to college, the education level in Banning would start to see a rise over the next couple of years.

The community of Banning looks quaint and historical, buildings are not shiny and new, but they do not look old and decrepit either. They hold a historical value, which is very clear as you are driving through their downtown area on Ramsey street. Every building looks as though it probably was during the founding years of Banning starting in 1913. When it comes to “historical towns” you wouldn’t normally think of Banning since it is barely one hundred and six years old, but the land has been housing people much longer than it has been called Banning. Various Indian tribes had settled this area, primarily the Serano and Cahuilla ([banning.ca.us](http://banning.ca.us)). Around 1774 a Mexican and Spanish expedition reached the area and began to put down their roots. By the time 1824 came around the San Gabriel Mission Fathers had set up a branch of the mission in the San Gorgonio Foothills, where various livestock were raised and bred. “The area was called Rancho San Gorgonio, named by the Mission Fathers after Street Gorgonio, a Latin

martyr” (banning.ca.us). “In 1853 Dr. Isaac Smith was the first white man to come to the area along with his wife and seven children. They bought land and built a house known as Smith’s Station, which transitioned to Highland Home and is now Highland Springs” (banning.ca.us). In 1854 the first permanent landmark was built in the area to become Banning: the Gilman Ranch adobe. This adobe was used as a stage shop for the Colorado Stage and Express Line, an early stagecoach that would later be turned into one of the longest railroads in the area in 1876 (banning.ca.us). Because this stagecoach express was one of the last stops before reaching Palm Springs, it was a haven of activity with people constantly loading and unloading from the coaches. Even though the railroad eventually replaced the stagecoach, Banning will forever be known as “Stagecoach Town U.S.A” (banning.ca.us).

The town was eventually founded and named in 1913 by General Phinneas T. Banning who had various historical accomplishments, “but is prominently known for his shipping company that went between San Pedro and Los Angeles, a huge proponent of the Los Angeles Port today” (banning.ca.us). General Banning also operated the stage line that went from Wilmington, CA to Yuma, AZ, travelling through the Banning pass (banning.ca.us). General Phinneas connected Banning, CA with Los Angeles, CA and is remembered through the town named after him and Phinneas Banning High School located in Los Angeles.

The rich history of the stagecoach can still be seen in Banning today, primarily through the storefronts which house wide porches, evidence of waiting areas where people would get on and off the stagecoaches. There is also a building in Banning that has never been refurbished or touched, it is one of the original storefronts, a small brown building that is fenced off and not open to the public, but is sitting in plain view in the downtown area for visitors and residents to

look upon. This building also has an original stagecoach that sits directly next to it, also behind the fenced area; both reminders of the town's rich history connected with early transportation and delivery of people and goods throughout the nation. The history of the stagecoach has directly affected the "can do" attitude of the community and pioneer resourcefulness (banning.ca.us). Banning is an overwhelming beautiful town with gorgeous views of the two tallest peaks in Southern California, Mt. San Geronimo and Mt. San Jacinto (banning.ca.us).

Another historical element of Banning, and a rather fun fact, was the discovery of a Mastodon fossil from the Pliocene Age in 1965; "many believe that this is evidence of a prehistoric lake that fed into the ocean" and was located right in the heart of Banning (banning.ca.us).

Two of the largest industry influencers on the area are the Morongo Casino and the wind farms located just to the East of the city. Many of my students have one or both parents that work in some respect at the casino or help with the wind farm electrical industry. Both of these industries have provided a large number of jobs and opportunities for residents of Banning and the surrounding towns, which is a huge pro when it comes to the area. When it comes to labor history, Banning was primarily made up of small stores and family run businesses. Some of these businesses are still around today, but the majority of businesses in Banning now are small restaurants and stores providing goods. Banning does a good job at keeping local small businesses up and running, with very few chains in the area, save for your average fast food restaurants.

There is a wide variety of housing in Banning, with the average price sitting at \$160,500 which is lower than the state average of \$371,400 (World Media Group, 2019). The average year

of a house built in Banning is 1983, which makes houses in the area rather new (World Media Group, 2019). While there are a lot of houses in Banning, a large portion of housing is made up of apartment complexes and mobile homes. In the downtown area of Banning there is a rather large mobile home park that has its gates right on Ramsey Street. There are various other mobile home parks in the area but the downtown one is the most prominent since people drive past it on a regular basis. Apartments in Banning are also plentiful, I would say that there are an equal number of houses and apartment complexes in the city. The apartments in Banning are nice though, they do not look run down and they are not small and dingy. The apartments can house up to eight people and they also provide kitchens, various bathrooms, and large living rooms. Although if I was to live in Banning, I would rather buy a house which automatically has more room than an apartment and is probably going to cost about the same as the monthly rent on an apartment in the area. Housing is not expensive at all, so why not buy a house and get more space for your money? This is a question that I have asked my students on various occasions because I have found that the majority of my students and their families live in apartments rather than houses. The answer that I always seem to get is this: when you live in a house you have to take care of everything, but in an apartment someone else takes care of the problems for you. The students are referring to the fact that if something goes wrong in an apartment with plumbing or heating, etc. the apartment manager will get it fixed for you; but if you live in a house you are responsible for fixing everything that breaks yourself. I thought that it was interesting to hear this point of view from my students, they are solely focused on that area of living, they have not even considered the fact that when you sell a house you get money, but when you leave an apartment you do not get anything in return.

Banning houses a lot of various resources, they are quite plentiful in their offerings. The city still owns their Electricity, whereas many cities have sold their electricity back to large companies like SoCal Edison. “Banning also owns Water/Wastewater Utilities Department,” whereas again many cities have contracted out to larger companies when it comes to handling those affairs (banning.ca.us). This is the perk of being a small town, they cannot completely afford to give away all of their businesses to larger companies that would probably streamline processes, but in the end they get to keep their resources and manage their own pricing and scheduling. The city also owns its own airport, Banning Municipal Airport, located on Hathaway Street with multiple entrances from various areas (banning.ca.us). Due to the airport the city also sells aircraft fuel which comes at a premium and brings back revenue to the small town. Other resources include the Banning Transit/Dial-A-Ride which has multiple stops all over the town and is a large source of transportation for the community (banning.ca.us). Banning houses a community center that has various activities for residents to partake in along with an aquatic center; not something that every city can provide (banning.ca.us). Banning is home to four community parks which house recreation centers, softball fields, picnic areas, and a playhouse (banning.ca.us). Another resource is the Banning Channel 10, which is the government access channel. It provides live broadcasting of city council meetings, planning commission meetings, and various other committees such as the water board and public works; this channel also provides a local event calendar and public service announcements when needed (banning.ca.us).

Besides community resources there are a lot of community services provided by various organizations, but the largest one being the Parks and Rec Department. The Parks and Rec team

provides community outreach, workshops, classes, sports, and revitalization plans (banning.ca.us). Some of the main facilities that are being used by the community are the Banning Senior Center, the aquatic facility, a large city skateboard park, and the Banning Community Center. The Parks and Rec Department also utilizes two schools in the area to put on recreation activities: Coombs Middle School and Banning High School (banning.ca.us). Some of the recreation activities provided are yoga, tot time, basketball, drill and cheer team, gymnastics, dance, martial arts, softball, football for all ages, soccer, water exercise classes, and swimming lessons (banning.ca.us). For a town that houses just over 30,000 people, that is a lot of activities that are offered on a consistent basis. Of course some of those programs are only offered during the summer, but many programs are offered year round.

All of these programs and resources offered to the community are a great asset to living in this area, Banning is able to provide a lot more for its' residents than many neighboring communities. However, there are amenities missing from Banning that the people would like to see. Banning does not have a gym like LA Fitness, 24 Hour Fitness, etc. The nearest gym is in Beaumont which is not a far drive but one gym to house thousands of people is quite a lot. Most cities have multiple gyms within a small area for people to go to. Banning's parks are also smaller in size than many residents would like. The people would like larger green space to run around, play with their kids, take their dogs on walks, or just spend quality time in. I have often heard students talking about the possibility of an open track being built in a new park since the current track for the area is located on the campus of Banning High School which is closed to the public. Overall, there are a lot of resources available to this community, and not a lot of

significant needs. Banning may be a small town, but they have a lot to offer their community members.

One large issue that Banning faces is their crime rate. It is actually astounding how much crime happens in such a small area. From 2007 to 2014, just seven years, there were fourteen murders, eighty-two reported rapes, two hundred and thirty-three robberies, nine hundred and twenty-seven assaults, one thousand nine hundred and nine burglaries, two thousand two hundred and thirty-four thefts, and seven hundred and sixty-five vehicle thefts (World Media Group, 2019). Those numbers are extremely high for a seven year period and honestly a little frightening when you think about the fact that you work in that area on a daily basis and sometimes walk to your car when it is completely dark. The crime index for Banning is number three hundred and thirty, out of the entire state of California; this is higher than the entire state of California and higher than the national average crime rate (World Media Group, 2019). These crime rates present a significant challenge for the city and the local police department. I believe that these crime rates stem from two sources, one being that the police department can only do so much with the amount of officers that they employ with only 25 officers in 2014, and two being that the Smith Correctional Facility, a main jail for Riverside County, is located in the city of Banning (World Media Group, 2019). This all adds up to the amount of crime that is seen on a yearly basis in the city of Banning. Besides the crime problem, the city really does not face a lot of other hardships, their crime rate is enough hardship for one city to endure.

### **Community Events and Community Members**

As a community Banning holds a lot of events for people to attend, and these events are not boring like business openings and ribbon cuttings, they are exciting and welcoming for everyone.



One of the key community events is Stagecoach Days which is held every Fall at Dysart Equestrian Park. This is a huge event for the community that is held to honor the Stagecoach history of Banning. This event is put on by the Non-Profit Stagecoach Days Association which is made up of local residents that want to continue to educate others on Banning's rich history. This association started in 2008 when the chamber of commerce decided that it could no longer hold the annual event (Pippenger, 2019). Local civic leaders and dedicated residents formed the association in order to preserve the event and keep its' legacy going; the forming of the association made it clear how special this event was because the association would not be associated with the city in any way or the chamber of commerce, yet the residents were still willing to take on the task. Stagecoach days has been happening since 1957 so it makes sense that the association wanted to keep it going instead of letting it end when the chamber quit hosting it. The association has not been completely on its own in hosting this large event though. They have received countless amount of support from local businesses, residents, various government agencies, and the Morongo Tribe (Pippenger, 2019). Stagecoach Days is not just a fun event to learn about the history of Banning, it is so much more. Besides re-enactments of how the town was founded, there are full on rodeos happening for four nights straight. Everything from bull riding, bronc riding, lassoing, team roping competitions, and more! This is a full blown rodeo that happens every year in the small town of Banning. There is even a rodeo queen that is crowned in a coronation ceremony the opening night, along with the opening night rodeo dance. Everyone is welcome to compete in this rodeo, from local contestants, to riders on the pro circuit, it is truly an event that you will not want to miss September 5-8, 2019 (Pippenger, 2019).

In 2018 I was able to attend one day of this rodeo and experience first hand the activities that happen there. I attended this event with some of my co-workers, people that live in Banning and the close neighboring cities. We walked around the event, ate a lot of food, and watched the rodeo competitions for the night. I was able to meet a lot of various community members while I attended this event. Most of the people that I met were not heavy city influencers or city council members, they were just average citizens looking to have a good time at stagecoach days. I met a couple while I was there, a husband and wife who are longtime residents of Banning. Our conversation started out like every other one I have had in my life. We were waiting for food and we started talking about what we were seeing around us, which rodeo events we were excited for, the basics. We moved on to introducing ourselves and I said that I was a new teacher at the High School. They congratulated me on getting the job and asked how I was liking it so far. We talked about the students and the classes that I was teaching and again they told me that they were happy for me and that they were pleased to see “such a young person” working with our youth. I asked them if they would tell me a little bit more about Banning since I was extremely new to the area. They began by telling me why it is called Stagecoach Town U.S.A. and told me more about the buildings in the downtown area. They mentioned that the historic Fox Theatre is located right at the intersection of Ramsey and San Geronimo and that I should see a movie there sometime. I later found out that one of my co-workers lives in a loft right next to the Fox Theatre and he can sometimes hear a movie playing if it is loud and booming enough. The couple I met got their food and told me to enjoy my evening and enjoy my year working at the High School. I saw them occasionally throughout the night, but we never stopped and had another in depth conversation like before, I have not seen them to this day but I know that they are probably

living their happy lives in Banning. If there was one thing that they said to me that really stood out, it was that while Banning may be small and may have more weed floating around than some would like, it is a town full of people that care. People that will go out of their way to help you and lend a hand. Throughout my time working in Banning I have seen that to be true, mostly as I am getting my morning coffee at the local Starbucks. The workers are always visiting with the regular customers and asking about their lives and families. I am considered a regular there now too and the workers chat with me while I wait for my coffee. I can truly see the small town feel that the couple told me about. It is evident in the smile on the old man's face who sits in the same chair at Starbucks every morning, it is there with the older lady who waits for the same Transit bus every day, it is there with all of the kids who walk with one another to school every day laughing and skateboarding and making lasting friendships.

Banning hosts a lot of other events throughout the year, Stagecoach days is just the largest one and the one that most people remember the best. Every spring there is a bowling night at Banning Canyon Lanes, Banning High School hosts a Magic Show every May, and the Tukwet Canyon Golf Course hosts a Golf Tournament every June (Pippenger, 2019). There is also a huge art event every Fall in Banning that invites people ages 5+ to submit their original art for judging and to be displayed at the art show. This art is displayed for a few weeks after the judging takes place and everyone is invited to come and see the art. Banning High School pairs with this event and encourages students from the art classes to submit their work. Some of the art teachers even offer extra credit for students that submit a piece. After the art show is over the High School collects all of the students art pieces and proudly displays them with their awards in the school office for the duration of the year. The halls of the office are lined from floor to

ceiling with various mediums, prints, and designs all made by the students of Banning High School. This is a wonderful way that the school encourages students to go out of their comfort zone and to reward them for doing so. Every student has the opportunity to participate in this art show, it is not just for students who are currently taking art classes at school. The art teacher even offers to stay after school and come early before school to work with students that want to submit a piece but are not currently enrolled in an art class. I am thankful to work at a school that supports the arts and encourages students to reach a potential that they probably never thought was possible for them.

### **School Site Research**

Banning High School is located at 100 West Westward Avenue Banning, Ca. There are a couple of ways that you could get to the school, but I like my way the best. If you get off at 22nd street you can either turn right and head to Idyllwild or go left and hit the Starbucks, I turn left every day. After the coffee run you can either head back down 22nd until you hit Westward Avenue and eventually the high school, or you can take my route. I like to head down Ramsey street after I get coffee because I get to drive through the downtown area every day and see the people on their way every morning. I like to turn on eighth street because I know that I will miss the train since eighth street goes under the tracks whereas 22nd and San Geronimo intersect with the tracks; the train is over three hundred cars long and if you get stuck waiting for it you will generally be late to school. Once you hit Westward Avenue you make a left turn and keep going straight until you see the High School on your right. If you reach San Geronimo you went too far and missed the parking lot. When you arrive at Banning High School you will be amazed, at least I was the first time I saw it, and I still am when the sun hits it just right. The school is

situated in the foothills of Mt. San Gorgonio and the view of the school cast against the backdrop of the mountain is simply breathtaking. Every building on the school campus boasts the same off white color for the outside walls and some type of forest green roof. The school colors are constantly debated but the three that remain constant are Kelly Green, White, and Black; gold used to be in there but no one has mentioned it for awhile so I am assuming that it is not a school color. There is one building on campus that stands above the rest, the 5000 building, and I am lucky enough to work in that building. It is the newest building on campus, and the nicest since most other classrooms are portable buildings. One of my co-workers always laughs with me and states that I should invite him to my palace sometime for meetings, meaning my classroom in the 5000 building since he is stuck in one of the portables. The office is situated just off of the main parking lot, with the American flag waving proudly in front of it. The library is also located just off of the main parking lot, all of the classrooms, cafeteria, and gym are further in the campus. Our school also has a wonderful state of the art athletics division. We have a new aquatic center capable of holding swim meets and water polo matches. Six tennis courts, six outside basketball courts, three outside baseball fields, a state of the art football stadium that also houses soccer games and a wonderful track. We also have an indoor gym that is used for pep rallies, basketball games, volleyball games, and wrestling matches; there is also a weight room located inside of the gym. It is truly a wonderful facility and I am lucky enough to get to utilize most of that equipment on a daily basis.

The benefits to this campus are that it is huge, open, welcoming, and at the same time secure. We have at any time on campus at least five security guards each with a designated area of campus that they are responsible for. One of the downsides to this campus is the speaker

system. It is not loud enough to be heard above the noise of the students walking to and from class and after four o'clock the office staff goes home so there is no one to work the system in the case of a lockdown after hours; one of which happened this past Fall and a student had to text everyone with the warning. While our campus is completely surrounded by a large fence, the parking lot is open until a certain time at night and once you enter the lot you can get anywhere on campus. There are plans in place to redesign the layout of the campus and move the office to where the library currently is. There will be a new fence put in place that forces everyone to enter the campus by first going through the office, checking in, and exiting out a back door. That would certainly deter any unwanted visitors from easily accessing our campus. However until that is done, we are welcoming anyone and everyone to take a stroll across our grass and sidewalks at any point during school hours.

Banning High School is known for pushing its students to achieve excellence, but it is also known for high turnover rates with teachers every year. This is not because the school is a bad place to work, it is primarily because the school is so far away from everything else that people generally get jobs closer to where they live. I on the other hand extremely enjoy where I work and I have plans in place to move closer to my job next year. The students at the school are also a small part of why teachers leave every year. There are some amazing students that strive for the best and want to achieve greatness, but there are those that hate school, come from rough home backgrounds, and take it all out on the teacher and their classmates. Most of these students are dealing with home lives that I cannot even imagine; single parent, foster homes, homelessness, and even wondering if they will be able to eat once they go home for the day. Circumstances like those have altered the way that these students interact with people around them. Occasionally I

hear students in class talking about their home situations but if I get too close, they end the conversation. I can only imagine that this is because they have created a close circle of trusted individuals, and their teacher is not one of those. These are the students that I truly know need my help the most, but do not want to let me in the most. They make me work at my job every single day, but I know that I am doing something for them just by being a constant adult figure in their life.

There are plenty of rules and norms in place for students to follow, the only problem is teachers and security guards actually enforcing them. We have a tardy sweep that happens every day, every period. This means that when the bell rings if you are not in class you need to report to the attendance office to get a tardy slip and then you have lunch detention. After three tardies you receive after school detention, and after three after school detentions you are suspended. These rules are not put in place to be mean to students, but to encourage attendance to every single class and to be on time for every single class. Students are constantly ditching and hanging out in random corners of campus, where security guards should be escorting them back to class, but most do not want to bother with that because it seems too trivial. I believe if more staff and security guards took these rules seriously and enforced them equally, students would be held more accountable for their actions on a regular basis.

Technology is almost a given right at our school, students are issued chromebooks their freshman year and do not have to return them until right before they graduate. If the student loses or damages the chromebook they have to pay for them, but insurance is offered to students every year for only \$25 and it covers everything that could and does happen to the chromebooks. Most students do not take advantage of this insurance though and like to tempt fate, believing that

nothing will happen to theirs and they will be fine. Unfortunately I have a couple seniors that felt that way and now have to pay around \$300 for their chromebook or they cannot graduate. The school has wifi that all the chromebooks are linked to and there is also a wonderful blocking system in place so that students cannot visit inappropriate websites or view inappropriate material. Sometimes this blocking is annoying because there are sites that I would like the students to use, to find scholarly articles and such, but the site will be blocked because it uses ads and the ads could be inappropriate. I appreciate the precaution that the school is taking and I understand the laws in place regarding censoring material, but as an educator it can be frustrating when I simply want my students to access educational materials.

When it comes to helping EL students, GATE students, and LGBTQ students, there are a wide variety of programs and activities in place to benefit and help. EL students have a specific counselor on site every day that is there to help place them in the correct classes and talk with them about their needs. The EL students also have designated ELD classes that help them integrate the material that they are learning in their mainstream classes. When the EL students are in their mainstream classes, there is an aide provided that will help all of those students when the need arises. The school has really done a good job at trying to make sure that the needs of EL students have been met on a daily basis. For GATE or advanced students there are AP classes, AVID classes, Honors classes, and dual enrollment classes that offer college credits and high school credits in Math, English, History, and Science. The students take these classes at the high school but they are receiving college credits at the same time. There are ample opportunities for these students to push themselves and challenge themselves on a daily basis if needed or wanted. For LGBTQ students there are clubs available and SAFE HOUSE which is a program on campus



that you can sign up for if you feel like you need a safe place to study, work, or just take some time away from it all. Other students do not know who is a part of SAFE HOUSE in order to protect the student's identity. All of these programs combined are designed to benefit students in every way possible no matter what their need is.

### **School Mission and Demographics**

The mission statement of Banning High School states that the goal is to “provide tomorrow's leaders with quality academic instruction and rigorous standards-based curriculum enhanced by a safe and respectful environment”, their vision statement is “Destination Graduation and Beyond”, and their motto is “Student Success, Every Day” ([bhs.banning.k12.ca.us](http://bhs.banning.k12.ca.us)). These statements combined were developed by the school board, the high school administration, and the superintendent of the school district. All three statements were put in place to encourage academic achievement and foster a growth mindset in every student. These statements cannot be accomplished just through administration, teachers, and students though, they require the support of parents and the community in order to see them through. The staff at the school set up an app called Parent Square that connects all parents not only with the students but with events happening at the campus and newsletters put out by the school's administration. This is one way that the school hopes to interact with parents and keep them involved with their student's learning and goals.

Banning High School has a diverse staff, with less than half of races being white, and everyone else making up various races from Hispanic, Black, Asian, Indian, etc. Students age composition is that of every other high school student, approximately age thirteen through eighteen or nineteen. The staff age composition is a little more varied though. The youngest

teacher on campus is twenty-two years old, and the oldest teacher on campus is seventy-six. Everyone else varies in ages from mid-twenties, thirties, forties, fifties, sixties, etc.

The graduation rate at Banning High School is not the highest and that is something that the staff and administration are actually currently looking at. We just started looking at data from the previous school year and we looked specifically at the graduation rate, noticing that it was sitting around 85% of students who entered freshman year make it until their senior year graduation. While this number looks high, it should be at 100%. Why are so many students dropping out of school and not graduating? This is a question that the entire school is currently looking into and we hope to find an answer by the end of the school year by taking surveys of all the current students at the school and seeing what they have to say.

The students that truly thrive on campus are the students that thrive on every other high school campus, the ones that try hard and put in the effort to succeed. Students that want to get good grades and want to excel will with the right amount of effort put in. Students that do not want to be there and do not want to succeed will be pushed by their teachers, but there comes a point when a teacher and parent can only do so much for a student. That student has to want to succeed in school, they have to want to do the work and they need to try their hardest on every assignment. The students that understand the value of hard work and a good education will succeed in everything they do because they see the long term goals in their lives. They know what it takes to get to where they want to go and they are putting in the work now to get there. As a teacher I push every single one of my students, but there are even some Freshman that I currently have that I can tell do not want to excel in school. They have big dreams of careers that

they would like to have, but they do not yet understand how education plays a role in achieving those careers.

### **Classroom Exploration**

I would like to say that my classroom is welcoming, warm, inviting, and a safe place to be. I have tried to create an environment where students want to be, not where they have to be. I have arranged the desks so that students are working in groups and creating relationships that will benefit them long-term. I have put posters and pictures around the room that are not only inspiring but educational as well. I have decorated my desk space with pictures of my family, items from my college graduation, and various knick knacks that represent my personality. I want my students to get a full picture of who I am, that I am a person too with life experience and hardships just like them. I want to be a teacher to them, but also a real person that they feel like they can trust and rely on to help them and educate them. Recently I bought two bean bags for the corner of my room and two lap desks to go with them. I wanted this to be a space where students could relax and study, but they had to earn the right to sit there. Students who do not turn in their work on time or have to be talked to about behavior during class cannot sit on the bean bags. While these are there to help students relax, they are also there to promote an environment where rewards are earned through your actions, not where rewards are just given away. The type of person that I am and the type of teacher that I am has greatly influenced the way that my room is set up and the environment that I have tried to create. I want to show my students that I am willing to put my personality out there and I am able to share who I am with my students.

In order to ensure a safe and respectful learning environment, I have talked with all of my classes about behavior in and out of the classroom and how we should always be treating one another. We also have Social Emotional Learning every Thursday where students are put through tasks, challenges, and activities that require them to work with teammates, share information about themselves, and be vulnerable and open at times. This was a hard task for some students because they did not want to share any personal information at first, but now they feel more comfortable with their classmates and they are opening up more and more every week.

There are rules in my classroom, and they have been discussed and displayed on the wall in the front of the room so that students can see them every day. These rules were created by me and the students in my classes. I wanted the students to feel like they had a say in what the class rules were, that way they are more inclined to follow them and not break them. I also have a point system set up in my classes where classes can earn points, but they can also lose points as well. Every tardy student is a point taken away and every time a class is prepared, quiets down immediately, and engages in class activities they are rewarded points. At the end of every month the points are tallied up and the class with the most points gets a party. The points are displayed at the front of the room so that classes always know where they stand in comparison to the other periods. This introduces a healthy side of competition and reinforces good classroom behavior.

I have a wide variety of learning styles, genders, academic levels, and needs within all of my classes. Most students are English speaking, but there are a few EL students in periods 2, 4, and 6. These students are always accommodated for and I differentiate my lessons to ensure that I am reaching everyone. Several accommodations include providing sentence starters, sentence frames, speech to text options, and group work in order to support learning. I have two classes of

honor students and the majority of them are technically “GATE”. One student has a 504 plan and none of my students have IEPs. The student with the 504 plan does not need a lot of accomodation but we work on things individually when problems do arise.

The main differences in all my classes are the academic levels. First period is Freshman but they are a higher achieving group. Fifth period is my other group of Freshman and that class in almost its entirety does not care about learning or attending school on a regular basis. The root cause of this apathy towards school is not entirely clear to me. I have tried reaching out to family members of these students and I have been met with apathy from the parents as well; I can only assume that if the parents do not value school then the students do not either. However, there are some students that are simply a mystery to me and to their parents as well. When I have called the parents to talk about a few students the parents are baffled at their child’s behavior and have told me that their child did not used to be this way, but in recent years has changed. There are about four students like that in my fifth period class and no one at the school can get them to open up or talk about what is going on; everyone can see that there is an issue, but if we cannot truly understand what is happening in the mind of that student, how can we help them? Second period are seniors and they are pretty high achieving although senior-itis is definitely setting in. There are quite a few students in second period that were doing wonderful during first semester and now they are failing my class. When I talked individually to those students, many of them informed me that they have become lazy and just want to graduate. I talked to them about the fact that if they fail their classes they cannot graduate, to which the students replied that they understood. It seems to me that these students are excited to graduate and they are focused on their lives after high school, but they are forgetting about their present classes and how those

grades will affect their ability to move on from high school or not. I am working with these students and encouraging them to try their hardest because I know that they can. Fourth and Sixth period are tenth grade English Honors, but fourth period is the higher level honors class out of the two. It is very interesting for me to look at classes of the same grade level and curriculum but see stark differences in how the students interact with one another and the material being presented.

Overall this is a wonderful group of students and an interesting area to teach in. Banning may not be perfect, it may have a lot of crime, but what city is going to be without problems? The way to get around all of that is to remember that the focus is on the students, not the city. Every student will walk into class with a certain amount of baggage, but as teachers we must figure out how to unpack that baggage with them and encourage them to leave it behind so that they can receive the best education possible.

### **Part D: *Analysis of Teacher Effectiveness***

#### **The Whole Class Perspective**

When I think about how my students are doing I cannot help but think about how far they have come this year and how successful they have been in their academic growth. At the beginning of the school year I was presented with a class of seniors that were high achieving but could also push themselves farther if encouraged to do so. I realized that I needed to gain the trust and respect of my students before I could challenge them academically, and that is exactly what I did. I worked on talking with my students and I tried to get to know every one of them on a more personal level. I took an interest in their lives and I showed them that I could be honest and open with them about my struggles in school and life. After just a short amount of time I

started to notice my students opening up more and more to me. It was during these moments that I realized my students were ready to be pushed farther and I could really start to challenge them.

I started challenging them by introducing a new unit on racial profiling provided by the Expository Reading and Writing Course. I knew that my students trusted one another, and me, enough to engage in respectful yet deep class discussions revolving around a sensitive and controversial topic. From this point forward I have been able to challenge my students and ask them for more when it comes to their work. I continually push their limits and encourage them to work harder than they think possible for themselves. I started this process simply by having my students write silently for ten minutes at the beginning of class every day. This may seem like a small and relatively easy task, but for a lot of my students it was not. They were not used to writing for an entire ten minutes on a single topic, they felt like they were running out of things to say and would just stop writing after a minute or two. During these ten minutes I would walk around the classroom and check on how students were doing. For students that were still writing I would say things like “good job” and “keep it up”. For students that had stopped writing I would read what they wrote and then give them a few ideas on how they could expand their ideas even further. We would engage in this style of writing three times a week, every week. Over time students began to get more comfortable with their writing and students who previously only wrote for two minutes could write for at least six minutes after only two months of doing this. Those same students are now writing for eight minutes straight, a huge accomplishment when I remember that they started the year writing for only one minute and then stopping. I do have a lot of students that can write for the entire ten minutes, and I am extremely proud of them for continuing to push themselves and engage in the writing process. Another way that this exercise

has pushed my students is through their sharing out portion after the ten minutes are over. I ask for three volunteers that would like to share what they wrote. At the beginning of the year I would generally have one student that would raise their hand and I would have to call on the other two at random. Now I have at least two volunteers every time we write, and they are generally different student volunteers every time. I know that it is not easy for the students to share their unique writing with the rest of the class, but every time they do it shows me how far they have advanced in their trust for one another.

Besides an advancement in writing length and trust for one another, my students have greatly advanced in their writing skills and abilities this year. I noticed at the beginning of the school year that many students would write the bare minimum and they would not expand on their ideas, no matter how good their ideas were. I had a hard time understanding why my students were not pushing themselves further and one day during a PLC meeting I had a revelation. As I sat and listened to other teachers in my department talk about student work, I realized that many teachers do not believe in their student's abilities and openly doubt them. This made me think about how I would feel if I knew that trusted adults in my life did not believe in me, so what if my students had heard other teachers talk about them in previous years? I decided that I needed to go easy on my students and not tear down their work like so many others had. Instead I congratulated them on the work that they were turning in and I would give minimal suggestions for improvement. I also implemented anonymous peer review so that students could help one another but also learn from their classmates writing. After about a month of allowing my students to write at a lower level I decided it was time to challenge them further. I told my class that for their next essay they could email it to me by a certain date and I would review it for



them. However, I warned the students that I would not hold back in my corrections if they chose to send it to me before finally submitting it. That way students knew it was a choice to receive harsher commentary and they could decide for themselves if they wanted that or not. I knew that students who did not send me their essays were waiting to see how their classmates reacted.

Would their teacher tear down their classmates work entirely, or would there be a healthy mix of constructive criticism and praise. I decided to let the students spread that word on their own and it worked. They realized that I was not going to criticize them and tell them how awful their work was. I was honest about what needed to be fixed, but I was also honest about what was good and working well within their writing. By the time my students submitted their next essay, I had almost double the amount of students asking me to revise their work before submitting it for a grade. I was proud of the fact that my students had developed enough trust in me and enough pride in their work that they were willing to have me revise it. Student growth is not always seen in academic benchmarks and state tests, sometimes it is the little things that show the most growth. However, it is important to focus on assessments and other forms of student work to judge success and advancement of student ability.

Although seniors at our high school do not have to take semester benchmark exams like the other grade levels, there are other ways to assess their progress. One of the ways that I have done that is through end of unit assessments. I have given multiple forms of assessments such as presentations, essays, and projects. I have given these assessments multiple times so that I can gauge how the students have improved each time they complete an assessment similar to a previous one. The first time my class was assigned a group presentation they were nervous and did not do very well. At least half of the groups did not meet the time limit listed on their rubric

and most of the students read directly off of their powerpoint word for word. I did not have a single group that earned an A on their presentation; one group earned a B but it was an 81, extremely close to a C. As a class we talked about how the presentations had gone and how we could improve them in the future. We practiced our presentation skills, how to explain information through bullet points, and how to make eye contact when speaking. When the class was assigned their second presentation they felt much more prepared and ready to receive higher scores. I watched during class as the groups worked and prepared for their assignment and I was confident that they would do better than the previous time. The day of the presentations some groups were worried because members of their group were not in class. I told them that we would wait as long as possible and have those groups go last, but if their members were still absent, they would have to present without them. I was amazed at the response from the groups as they rallied together and figured out how to present without one of their members. One by one each group presented and they were all better than the first time. Some students still had trouble making eye contact, and others had difficulty not reading directly off of their slides, but for the most part each group showed significant improvement. Groups that earned a D or C on their first presentation now earned a C or B, and groups that earned a C or B the first time now received mostly Bs but one group did earn an A. At our class debrief each student talked about how they felt they did and I could see the pride that each of them had at realizing how much better they did. These students definitely improved after their first presentation and I know that as we continue to present material as a class they will only improve more and more.

Another form of assessment that I gave to my students was project work. I attended a project-based high school so I understand the immense value behind putting your learning into

actual tangible work. The first project that my class had to complete was a shadow box representing something that they wanted in their future. There were certain categories that they had to pick from; this matched up with our “Life After High School” unit in the ERWC. Most students found it difficult to explain and showcase their ideas through an actual project. They could not figure out how to make something that represented their goals. I guided them and explained what I was looking for, I even showed examples to the class. That seemed to ease a few of them and give them a sense of direction, but some students still struggled with the idea of presenting their work in project form. These students would come into my room before and after school to receive help and I was proud of them for seeking out help on a project that they were clearly uncomfortable and unfamiliar with. There were a few students that turned in their projects early and upon seeing them I had hope that the projects overall would be excellent. However, when the exact due date came I realized that while most students completed the project to the exact specifications listed on the rubric, there were a few students that had clearly given up on their work and submitted the bare minimum if that. We completed this project early in the year so it was a good gauge for me to see how students would do on actual projects. I knew that as a class we needed to practice our project skills and work on the quality of our work before another project was introduced. The second time that I assigned project work I told the class that I expected more out of this project than their first one since we had been working on how to present material in a project format for quite awhile. The second project was a vision board that included aspects from each unit we covered during the first semester; students turned this in and presented it as their first semester final. This time almost half of the class turned in their work early and the boards looked wonderful. On the day that the boards were due and the students had

to present I was pleased with the material that I saw and the way that the students presented. Over eighty percent of the class received an A on the project and either a B or A on their presentation. The other twenty percent of the class did not do bad on the assignment, they received mostly Cs and Bs on their work. Every student seemed confident and calm as they presented their vision board, just another indicator that the students were getting better with their project and presentation skills. Overall I have seen an improvement in student work throughout the course of this school year, I have seen students excel and improve in their social skills as well. I am proud of the work that they have been submitting and I can say with confidence that each and every one of my students is constantly growing and they are now challenging themselves in every assignment, no matter how big or small.

### **The Individual Student Perspective**

While my class as a whole has grown and achieved so much this year, it is important to reflect back on the progress that my focus students have made. Taylor has a significant life experience that impacted the way he interacted with others and the way that he approached school. Sean is an EL student that proved others wrong and accomplished so much more than he thought was possible for himself. Sarah is incredibly gifted and registers on the GATE level even though she was bounced from foster home to foster home growing up.

Taylor's biggest hurdle to overcome was the way that he interacted with other students. Because he was homeless for a good amount of time he learned to put up walls and not let anyone in. His trust issues prevented him from making lasting friendships and also hindered him from asking his teachers for help because he did not think that they actually cared. He had to fend for himself and look out for his family, so letting anyone else in was a significant challenge.

This lines up with research that talks about students who come from poverty and how “students from low-income households are more likely to struggle with engagement” (Jensen, 2013). I began helping Taylor overcome this difficulty by talking with him one-on-one about letting others in and how to trust people. I showed him that he could trust me and let me in enough to help him with his school work, college applications, and SAT prep. I further pushed him by encouraging him to really open up during our Thursday Social Emotional Learning activities. At first he was reluctant to trust his classmates and share his feelings or answer questions honestly during those Thursdays. I continued to encourage him and incorporated smaller group activities on Thursdays so that Taylor, and any other reluctant students, would feel more comfortable since many people will open up in smaller settings first rather than large ones. After just a few weeks I tried a whole class activity again and to my surprise Taylor actually shared how he was feeling and his classmates rallied around him and supported him. He was incredibly surprised that he could trust his classmates, and since that day he has continued to be open and share more and more during our Thursday activities.

While I tried my best to help Taylor and encourage him to open up, there were times that I feel like I let him down and I did not do enough to support him. I went through a difficult period of time at the end of the first semester and it caused me to close myself off from my students for awhile. I lost trust due to various reasons and it made me scale back on our Thursday activities. My students noticed that I was acting slightly different and they began to pull back as well. The very carefully cultivated relationship that I had with my students, and Taylor, was beginning to slip away and it was my fault entirely. When I finally realized that I needed to bring back our Thursday activities I was met with resistance and hesitancy from my class. They were not back

at square one, but they certainly had stopped trusting one another at the level that they were previously at. At this point in the year we are almost back to our highest point with trust as a class. I am continuing to work with Taylor on opening up to his classmates and trusting those around him. As a class we did a trust walk a few weeks ago and it really helped everyone work together and build stronger relationships. I was going to watch the activity and not participate but my class told me that if I wanted them to trust one another then I had to show them that I trusted them as well. So I participated in the activity and I was led around our school blindly by one of my students. I trusted him to guide me and not walk me into anything, which he did once but we laughed about it. Taylor really enjoyed this activity and for the rest of that day he would tell me how much fun it was and how much he really enjoyed getting to do it. I am proud of the progress that Taylor has made and I am continuing to talk with him about how to trust others in the future. Next year Taylor will start college and I know that it will be difficult for him to continue trusting those around him when he does not know them at all. He and I talk about the fact that you will not always know the people that you have to work with, but that does not mean that you need to push them away or refuse to work with him. There are moments when I run Taylor through scenarios that he may come across next year. I ask him how he would handle them and we break each situation down until he feels comfortable and ready to face it. I know that Taylor will face difficulties next year, but I hope that I have prepared him enough to face them with all the necessary tools for success.

When Sean arrived in my class I could immediately tell that he was bright by the way that he talked with those around him, but it was not completely evident through the work that he turned in. I could not understand why Sean was completing a level of work that he was clearly

beyond capable of. I talked with Sean briefly one day after class and told him that I thought he was extremely smart, but that he needed to show me that through his work. He promised to try harder and at times he would, but not all the time. Sean was turning in mediocre work and his grades were beginning to drop because of it, I decided that a longer sit down talk with Sean was necessary to get to the root of the problem. When I talked with Sean he informed me that he did not feel very smart because he had been labeled as an EL student for most of his academic years. He had heard other students talk down to EL students and refer to them as the “dull crayons in the box.” Because of these moments Sean convinced himself that he was not good at school and never would be so why try your hardest on assignments? I began to change the way that I approached Sean and his work ethic because I knew that if I pushed too hard he would get scared and walk the other way. I had to adapt to the pace that Sean was at and learn where his comfort levels were so that I could “work within his zone of proximal development” (Hill, 2008). I started by providing small sentence frames on google classroom so that all students could benefit and so that Sean would not feel singled out. I also did not call on Sean to read out loud because I did not want him to feel embarrassed if he could not read everything on the screen like his classmates could. I began to have Sean read out loud by calling on him to share his individual writing stories in the beginning of class. Other students shared as well, but Sean felt more comfortable reading in this setting because it was something that he had created and therefore knew what the words on the page were. As Sean got more comfortable reading out loud I felt that it was time to have him read pieces of an article like his classmates had been doing. The first time that I called on him to read he was reluctant, so I pointed out the section that I wanted him to read, just a small paragraph, but by showing him where it would end I could tell that he felt

more at ease. I began to have Sean read more frequently and when he would stumble on words I would help him like I would any other student. His ability to read and write at the level of his classmates had always been there, but Sean had stopped trying to show how smart he was because he was afraid of failing and looking dumb.

I stopped calling on Sean to read and just let him volunteer instead but after awhile he stopped raising his hand and I still was not calling on him. Sean was getting by doing the bare minimum and I had stopped challenging him because I forgot that he needed to be pushed. I released responsibility a little bit too early and Sean started slipping through the cracks again. I began calling on Sean to read out loud again and he stumbled for awhile and I could tell that he was embarrassed. I told him that if we do not practice something we will lose it, so he needed to constantly practice the skills that he wanted to retain. Sean is reading out loud and raising his hand to answer questions almost every day and I can tell that he feels comfortable in our class environment. I am encouraging Sean to raise his hand and participate in class when he goes to college next year. I know that it will be easy for him to sit in the back and complete the minimum amount of work, but he can do so much more. I plan on checking in with Sean and asking him how he is doing in his classes next year. I will not let him slip through the cracks again.

Sarah is an extremely bright and gifted student; her knowledge extends beyond her classmates so far that she can actually make those around her feel dumb at times. At the beginning of the year Sarah would constantly raise her hand and answer questions before being called upon. She was eager to show how smart she was even if it was at the expense of her classmates. There was a moment in class when I had called upon another student to analyze a



piece of poetry and when that student could not answer my question Sarah said, “it’s really not that hard just answer it.” The look on the other student’s face was pure embarrassment and I told them that it was okay because poetry was hard and I could not have answered that question in high school. I kept Sarah after class that day and told her how she had made the other student feel. She was completely oblivious to it because she knew the answer and was annoyed that it was taking so long. I told her that not everyone analyzed and understood things at the same level that she did, but that she could not make others around her feel dumb, on purpose or not. I told Sarah that she should try writing down the answers in her head in her composition books so that I could still read them and so that she would not get frustrated when she could not say everything she wanted to. I do not allow Sarah to answer every question in class or read constantly because while I know that she can, so do her classmates and they will ride her tailcoats as long as I allow it. This allows Sarah to work on her patience because that is another area of life that I noticed she needed to work on. I try to assign Sarah lengthier writing prompts so that she can express herself in the best way possible. Sarah also became my TA during fifth period so that she can stay busy and help with one of my other classes. This challenges her because she has to work on how she words things to my fifth period students since they are freshman and she is a senior. I also believe that this helps Sarah because research has shown that gifted students need “a different kind of interaction with the teacher who must be less of a sage on the stage and more of a guide on the side” (Azzam, 2016). I feel like I am helping Sarah in different ways by allowing her to express her thoughts and abilities in our senior class and by challenging her patience and ability to word things during my fifth period class.

There are areas where I could have pushed Sarah harder and challenged her more but I did not because I felt like her classmates would have seen it as favoritism or singling out in some way. When it came to final projects and presentations, I gave Sarah the same work that everyone else had, when instead I should have given her more to do or made her tasks more challenging in order to push her. I realized that I was letting myself get complacent in the work that I assigned Sarah and I stopped assigning her the same work, no matter how I thought it might come across. Sarah needs to be challenged and pushed because she is capable of more than she probably realizes. She has the potential to make something great of herself if she reigns in her patience and sticks with school. Sarah wants to join the military next year and I am encouraging her to do so. I think that it would be the perfect challenge for her and it would be a wonderful way to introduce more structure in her life. I am constantly encouraging Sarah to push her limits and challenge herself even when it seems scary or unattainable. I know that Sarah is going to do great things and accomplish so much, I am glad that I had the chance to have been a small part of that.

All of my focus students have grown so much this year, and only a small part of it was because of me. I feel like I showed them the strength and ability that they all had inside of themselves and they took off running with it. All three of them are extremely bright and while they may face different challenges in life, they can all be successful if they continue to work on the skills that they have learned this year.

### **The Developing Professional Perspective**

As my first year of teaching comes to an end I feel that it is only right to reflect back on all that I have learned and all the areas that I have experienced growth. Being a teacher is hard work, do not let anyone ever tell you otherwise. It is an extremely difficult profession, but I would

argue that it is also the most rewarding profession. Before I started this year, even before I started my summer teaching, I wrote the first part of this thesis and in that paper I discussed how scared I was to become a teacher. These fears were real and I found out that many other teachers feel the same way during their first year. Research shows though that some of the best ways to help new teachers with their fears is to “provide reasonable teaching assignments, design mentoring programs carefully, build a network of contacts, and provide a comprehensive induction program” (McCann, 2005). However, I did not know or understand any of that before I started teaching and that is why the entire ten or more pages of part A are filled with the ramblings of an inexperienced student who was frightened at the possibility of working with students. I was afraid that students would not listen to me, that I would never be able to control a classroom and there would be mass chaos every day; I could not have been more wrong on that front. There were moments early in the year when I felt out of control with certain classes, I felt like they were running the show. Looking back I cannot even remember what I did exactly to gain control of those classes, it just seemed to happen so naturally and at a very fast pace. I set forth rules and boundaries at the very beginning of the year, and that helped to “draw a clear and flexible path for success” (ASCD). As One thing that I do remember is the joy that I felt once I created a seating chart. I was so scared to create one at first because so many students had threatened me and told me that they would make my life hell if I moved their seat. That fear took over and prevented me from doing my job right, it prevented me from working closely with a period of students that so badly needed support. The day that I created that seating chart I felt empowered and renewed. Some of my students gave me difficulty over it, but I gave them their option of staying in their assigned seat or visiting the dean everyday until they were no longer

defiant. I had to learn to put my foot down and stand by my rules, no matter how negatively the students reacted. If I remained fair and consistent many problems disappeared.

Another fear that was present in part A was the fact that high school shootings seemed to be happening more frequently and here I was about to become a high school teacher. I was so scared that I might work at a school where a shooting might occur. When I looked up the history of school shootings at my site and saw that one happened just a few years ago, I honestly almost looked for another job. I could not even imagine working someplace where that kind of danger existed, but then I met my students and everything changed. I started to fall in love with the students that I have in class every day. I began to see their potential and their unique personalities, and I began to see how much they trusted me. It really hit home one day when a few of my students in first period asked me in a frightened tone if I would be around next year to teach them. I heard the panic in their voice that another teacher they trusted might leave and I knew that I could not let them down. I had to be strong for them because they needed me almost as much as I needed them. The day of our first lockdown I was truly scared, but I knew I had to hide that from my students because they were scared too. I remember moving my students to a wall away from the door's view and turning the lights off. I stood between my students and the door and put my hands on the back of a chair, and I knew in that moment that if anyone had tried to come in my room and get to my kids I would have done anything to protect them. I felt so confused after that lockdown passed, I had expected my fear to take over but instead adrenaline took its place and empowered me to stand before my students. I broke down and cried once everyone left because the adrenaline had left my body and my emotions finally came out. We have had at least one lockdown a month since then, it is almost a regular occurrence, but

everytime one happens I know what I need to do, I know that I need to protect my students and show them that I will always stand for them.

The only time that I felt true fear for myself and my students was the day that we received a bomb/active shooting threat through social media. No one knew if it was real or not but the police presence on campus made everyone feel like the threat was real enough to leave school. I did not want to go to work that day, we received the threat early in the morning before work, but I knew that my students would need a safe room if something happened and I would provide that for them. I think it's ironic looking back now at all of the fears that I talked about in part A because I have experienced almost every one of them at my job this year. Even though it has been scary at times, I know that I can handle those fears and move past them for the sake of my students.

One of my greatest successes has also been my greatest challenge this year, balancing teaching full time and coaching water sports. This was my greatest success for multiple reasons; I challenged myself and accomplished more than I thought possible, I got to know my students on a deeper level through coaching, and I got to really enjoy my job through different aspects. Being a teacher has been so rewarding and encouraging for me, it is the best job that I could possibly be at. Getting to coach after I am done teaching for the day is also extremely rewarding because I love water sports and the opportunity to be the head coach of two water sports teams was an amazing experience. But the greatest challenge here was learning how to balance everything that life was throwing at me while still getting all of my jobs done. I still had to lesson prep, grade my students work, and be available to answer their questions before and after school. Along with that I had to create workouts every day for water polo and swim, I had to coach for

two hours after school, and take time off frequently to attend away matches and meets. There was a time when this all started to take a toll on me and I was not sure if I could handle it on top of the homework I had to complete for school. It was a true test of my character and I am honestly not sure how I got through that difficult time, but I am glad to say that I did and I came out stronger and more capable because of it. I have learned more about my ability to take on tasks and complete them this year than any other time in my life. I know that this year was busier than most first year teachers want, but I would not change any of the jobs that I got to be a part of. However, as a teacher my greatest successes are not my own, they belong to my students. Everytime I see a student achieve something that they did not think was possible, I feel like I have done my job right in some way. I do not want to say that I am solely responsible for the success of my students, but I do feel like I was able to play a small part in their year of growth. I know that had I been an awful teacher my students would not have learned at all, so that tells me that I must have been doing something right by them this year.

When it comes to personal strengths and challenges as a teacher I have a few. I would say that my greatest strength is my ability to open up to my students and gain their trust and respect early on. This allowed me to work more easily with all of my students because they trusted me and let me in. I was honest about my own struggles in school and that showed my students that I am a real person too, a real person that they can relate to. I was able to successfully make lessons that engaged and supported my students, I could design lessons and assessments to really challenge my students, and I could grow as a professional educator. However there are areas where I still need to grow and develop more to be an even more effective teacher. I need to attend trainings so that I can work more fluidly with the rest of the English Department, I need to

learn more about the AP materials so that I can hopefully teach those classes in the future, and I need to work on being more organized with my lesson materials so that I can run classes smoother. That ties in with one of my personal goals for next year: to create a filing system in my large classroom drawer that contains materials that I have used for each grade level so that year by year I have master copies and I can more effectively teach various units. That would also help me to become more organized with my teaching materials which is another personal goal, to just be more organized in my classroom in general.

During this year I could not have been effective in any way, shape, or form without the guidance and support of other educators around me. There are three people that stand out the most to me: Jennifer Emshoff, Lovette Donaldson, and Keisha Goosby. Each of these professional educators has played a role in who I am as a teacher and I cannot thank them enough for their guidance and support. Jennifer helped me during my summer teaching portion in so many ways. She taught me how to lesson plan, how to maintain control of a class with rowdy students, and how to call an angry parent for the first time. She supported me and practiced job interviews with me so that I would not be so scared of the questions that I might be asked. When my grandfather passed away in the middle of teaching one day, Jennifer allowed me to leave and then supported me as I finished the last part of my summer teaching. She was more than a support, she was a great friend and I owe so much to her. Lovette was the kick in the pants that I needed and also the support that I never knew existed. She came down hard on our class at first because she wanted to impress how serious this program was and is. She made us practice our lesson plans until they were perfect and she taught us how to plan out an entire unit. She supported us, laughed with us, and guided us so well. She also supported me when my

grandfather passed away and she encouraged me to keep going even when I wanted to quit. The biggest impact though has been from Keisha, she is unlike any other professional that I have met in this program. We have learned so much about differentiating instruction for our students and Keisha does that on a weekly basis with our cohort. She is constantly bombarded with questions and concerns to which she calmly replies and answers every single time. Keisha is strong and steady, she has walked me through this program and helped me walk away from every challenge as a stronger person and teacher. I cannot even imagine not having Keisha's support next year, or talking to her every Saturday because she is truly a large reason why I have made it this far. All of the scholarly materials have been helpful and guiding, but the impact of these three educators has far outweighed any knowledge or support that I received from a textbook or anyone else at CGU.

Being an effective educator does not mean that you always have it together, that you are always doing everything right. It means that you are messing up, that you are being real with your students, and most importantly that you are trying your hardest to always improve and teach to the best of your ability. Every student that walks through my door deserves the best, so that is what I will strive to give them every single day. I stand firm with a quote that I created earlier this year, "being an effective educator means that you have to get to know your students, their unique abilities-their skills-their strengths-their weaknesses. Understand what they all bring to the table, and then use that, use it to engage, excite, and teach every child that walks in your door" (King, 2019). I do not always have to know exactly what I am doing, I am sure there are going to be a lot of days where I am confused and unprepared. But I know that as long as I



always have the best interest of my students at heart I will always remain an effective educator. Here's to the rest of my career, may it be as exciting and invigorating as my first year ever was.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this year I have learned more about what it means to be an effective teacher than I ever thought possible. I have had the opportunity to work with amazing students who have shown me their true strength and ability. This ethnographic narrative puts my first year as a teacher into a very real perspective. I tried to be honest about my fears and apprehension in part A. I know now that those fears are normal, every teacher worries about what is going to happen during the worst moments at school. Throughout this year I have learned to conquer those fears and I have overcome many of them. I have grown as a teacher and I have learned effective ways to manage a classroom and how to work with students of varying abilities and needs. I know that I will continue to learn and grow in this profession as long as I am willing to learn and keep an open mind about every new student that walks through my door. I will continue to stand firm in my belief that the more a teacher gets to know their students on an individual level, the easier time that teacher will have when it comes to working with their students. If a student knows that you truly care about them then they will work for you and with you.

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## Appendix A: Sean's Work

### Changing Active Verbs to Passive Verbs

Rewrite the following sentences from active to passive and indicate how the focus of the sentence changes. If you include the agent in your rewrite, put the "by" phrase in parentheses. Talk with a partner about why a writer might choose one focus instead of the other for each sentence. Always check your writing to make sure you have a good reason for using the passive.

Example:

1. In New York in 2009, law-enforcement personnel stopped black and Hispanic men simply because of their race.

*In New York in 2009, black and Hispanic men were stopped simply because of their race.*

*Active sentence focus: law-enforcement personnel*

*Passive sentence focus: black and Hispanic men*

2. In New York, the cops stopped 13 percent more people in the first nine months of 2009 than in 2008.

In New York, 13 percent of people were stopped by cops in the first nine months of 2009 than in 2008.

Active sentence focus: the cops stopped

Passive sentence focus: 13 percent more people

3. The police found weapons on just 1.4 percent of Hispanics.

1.4 percent of hispanics were found with weapons by the police

Active sentence focus: the police found

Passive sentence focus: 1.4 percent of Hispanics

4. The police stopped people of different races in the same proportion that they committed crimes.

People of different races were stopped by police

Active sentence focus: police stopped people

Passive sentence focus: people of different races

5. But the police should not harass individuals who have not done anything wrong.

Individuals should not be harassed by the polices espacailly those who did nothing wrong

Active sentence focus: police should not harass

Passive sentence focus: individuals should not be harassed

## Rhetorical Grammar

### Identifying Passive Verbs

Underline the subjects and highlight the passive verbs or verb phrase in the guided composition. Put (parentheses) around the "by" phrases that indicate the agent.

*Example: 1. According to Bob Herbert, New York police officers need to be restrained from using ethnic profiling.*

2. During the first three-quarters of 2009, 450,000 people in New York were stopped (by the cops).

3. Blacks and Hispanics were stopped much more often than whites. (police)

4. Contraband, usually drugs, was found in just 1.6% of the stops of blacks and 1.4% of Hispanics.

5. Weapons were found in even fewer stops.

6. "People" are "stopped" for making furtive movements or wearing "inappropriate attire for the season."

7. People going about their daily business are menaced out of the blue (by the police).

8. Lalit Carson was stopped on his lunch break from his job as a teaching assistant. ( By the police)

9. A class-action lawsuit has been filed against the city (by The Center for Constitutional Rights). It is time to put an end to Jim Crow policing in New York City

**Figure A.1 and A.2:** Early work that Sean did in class showing that as an EL student some words and phrases are more difficult.

1. Think back of Semester 1, what is one thing that stood out to you (please do not say too much homework as an answer)?

Our class in general, in my opinion, this class was so easy or Miss. King made it easy because for me English is hard because I'm not used to it, but there was always my teacher to help me out. It was exciting every project that we did like the vision board, it gave us an idea of what we want or where we want to go. another thing that stands out were the Thursdays, because of Miss. King, we know a little about each one and understand a little bit better the lives of others and realize that there will always be someone with the same problem or someone who can help us.

*Figure A.3: Sean self assessing at the end of Semester 1*



**1.17 ELA Common Assessment**

1. Benevolent and benefit are related English words that come from Latin. What does benevolent mean?
  - a. Private and hidden
  - b. Harsh and harmful
  - c. Kind and generous
2. Commemorate and memory are related English words that come from Latin. What does commemorate mean?
  - a. To locate a place on a map
  - b. To correct a mistaken idea
  - c. To pay tribute to a past event
3. Regicide and regal are related English words that come from Latin. What does regicide refer to?
  - a. The murder of a king
  - b. The murder of a father
  - c. The murder of a son
4. Guise and disguise are related English words that come from Latin. What does guise refer to?
  - a. An unwelcome appearance
  - b. An external appearance
  - c. A celebrity appearance
5. Facade and face are related English words that come from French. What does facade refer to?
  - a. The basement of a building
  - b. The roof on a building
  - c. The front of a building
6. Virulent and virus are related English words that come from Latin. What does virulent mean?
  - a. Quiet and bashful
  - b. Wrong and shameful
  - c. Severe and harmful
7. Domicile and domestic are related English words that come from Latin. What does domicile mean?
  - a. School
  - b. Office
  - c. Home
8. Judicious and judge are related English words that come from French. What does judicious mean?
  - a. Creative
  - b. Wise
  - c. Spontaneous

**Figure A.4:** Sean's assessment showing how much he had learned throughout the first semester. His growth was wonderful.

Sean - end of year work

Debate Notes

- Kids aren't given the chance to rehabilitate/reform themselves
- If they are released they should be carefully watched
- Possibly give the juveniles house arrest
- Children as young as 13 are sentenced to life w/o parole
- "Threat Kill"
- Life w/o parole should be determined case by case. It should be dependent on the individual themselves and the evidence presented
- Should juveniles have a chance to show that they have matured and have been reformed?
- It has been shown to be cruel & unusual to deny juveniles a hearing to show their maturity since the crime.
- What counts as being mentally unstable?
- Does a bad childhood (abusive household, suicidal, bad neighborhood/environment) give an excuse for committing a murder?
- Does it give the right to plead as mentally unstable?

Sean p.2 end of year

- Should the 14-year-old be given a chance for parole after killing somebody? (abusive childhood, mentally unstable, bad neighborhood)
- Child doesn't know right from wrong because he was never shown any better by his parents
- Could he have gotten help from a teacher/school official?
- Some children don't participate, don't interact with other, keep to themselves
- Teachers sometimes don't notice the things that their students are going through. They have too many children to keep track of.
- Children should seek out help
- 14-year-olds can't vote, drink, get married, or drive but can be sentenced to life in prison w/o parole
- If someone murders somebody with their bare hands rather than a weapon, is it any different? (an example could be a fight)
- If a fight breaks out, and one party dies, should the person who "kills" the other be charged with murder and be sentenced to life in prison w/o parole?

**Figures A.5 and A.6:** Showing Sean's work towards the end of the school year. He has progressed greatly in his writing ability.

## Appendix B: Sarah's Work

### 1.17 ELA Common Assessment

1. Benevolent and benefit are related English words that come from Latin. What does benevolent mean?
  - a. Private and hidden
  - b. Harsh and harmful
  - c. Kind and generous
2. Commemorate and memory are related English words that come from Latin. What does commemorate mean?
  - a. To locate a place on a map
  - b. To correct a mistaken idea
  - c. To pay tribute to a past event
3. Regicide and regal are related English words that come from Latin. What does regicide refer to?
  - a. The murder of a king
  - b. The murder of a father
  - c. The murder of a son
4. Guise and disguise are related English words that come from Latin. What does guise refer to?
  - a. An unwelcome appearance
  - b. An external appearance
  - c. A celebrity appearance
5. Facade and face are related English words that come from French. What does facade refer to?
  - a. The basement of a building
  - b. The roof on a building
  - c. The front of a building
6. Virulent and virus are related English words that come from Latin. What does virulent mean?
  - a. Quiet and bashful
  - b. Wrong and shameful
  - c. Severe and harmful
7. Domicile and domestic are related English words that come from Latin. What does domicile mean?
  - a. School
  - b. Office
  - c. Home
8. Judicious and judge are related English words that come from French. What does judicious mean?
  - a. Creative
  - b. Wise
  - c. Spontaneous

**Figure B.1:** Sarah's Assessment from the end of Semester 1



## Semester 1 Reflection

For full credit, answer each question with a complete paragraph adding examples to support your answer. If your answer is too vague (ie: my semester was great! I did everything I was supposed to do...), you will not earn points for that statement or question.

1. Think back of Semester 1, what is one thing that stood out to you (please do not say too much homework as an answer)?

Well one thing that stood out to me was the way that

you interacted with the students ■ I loved it because it felt like you really cared about us and wanted what

was best for us ■ I know that it was probably annoying for the first few weeks when you didn't know us and

now were all loud :) ■

What was one plus (positive ) that you learned from first semester?

Just to remember to take things slow ■ Even if something is bothering you, you have to take the time to do things on your own and not let others influence

you to procrastinate ■ Even if i have something that i can't do i know that i can always come to you and ask for help ■

/hat was one thing you would have like different from : semester?

Probably the person that i sit next to everyday ■ I hated that he didn't do any of his work and sometimes it made me not want to work and thats what sucked and kinda made me focus more was knowing and seeing his grades drop as he sat there and did

nothing ■ so i probably would have changed the

person that i sat next to ■

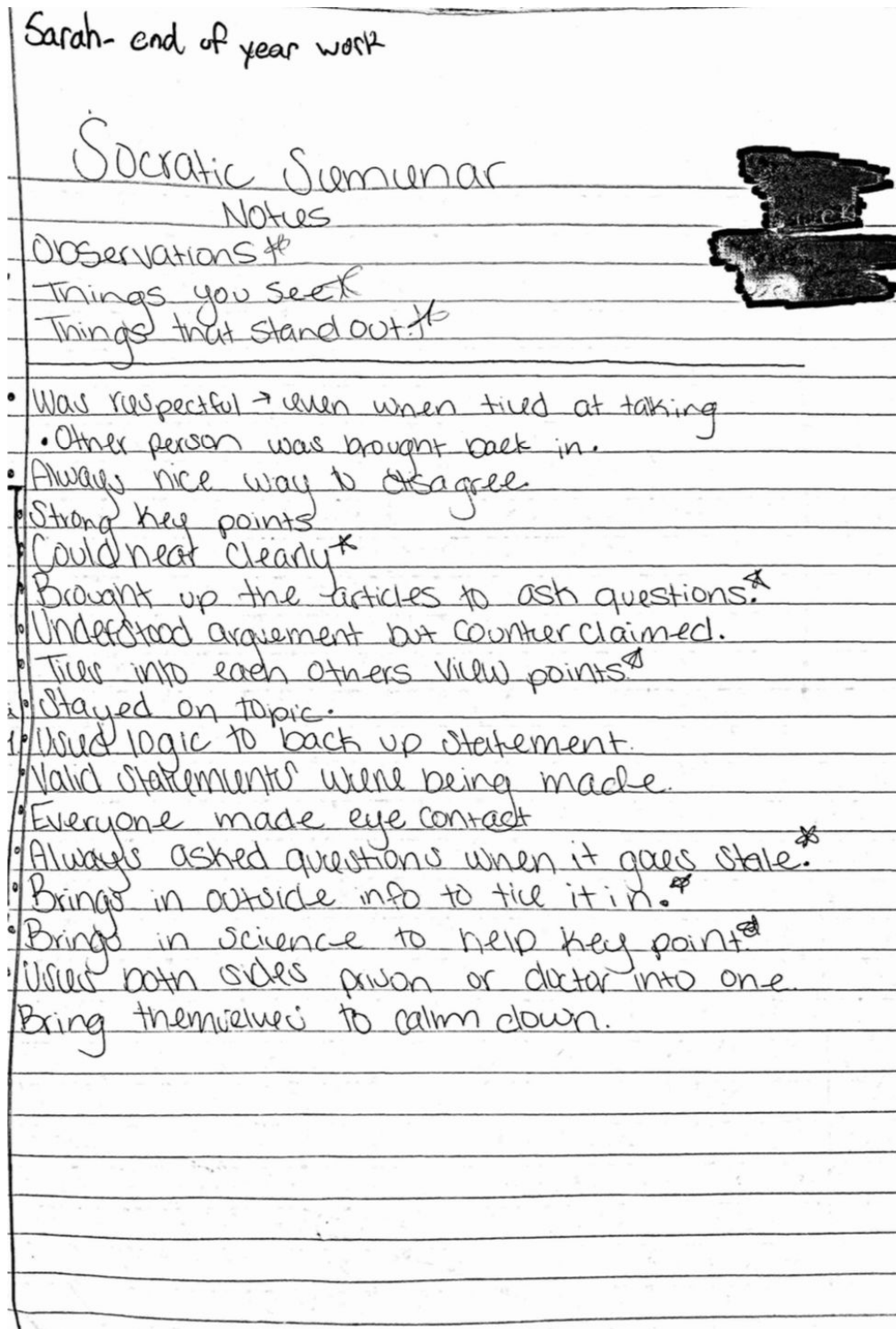
**Figures B.2 and B.3: Sarah's self assessment from then end of semester 1.**

**Take a Stance:**

Many of the population believes that if you are a juvenile and you commit a crime then you need to be given an easier sentence because of your age. Personally i feel that isn't the case. I believe that if you murder someone you should spend the most, if not all of your life in prison with no chance of parole. Why should you get a second chance at life when the person you murdered didn't? These are some of the things that need to be talked about and considered when sentencing someone. I believe that juveniles should be sentenced to life in prison without parole.

Although your brain isn't fully developed like it states in the article "Startling finds on teenage brains," doesn't mean that you don't know right from wrong because even a 2 year old knows the difference, which is a known proven fact. As it states in the article "Kids are kids until they commit crimes" kids are old enough to make decisions for themselves and they should be held accountable for the crimes that they commit. I believe that adolescents should not be let off of the hook just because there brains are still developing. Nathaniel Brazil killed his favorite middle school teacher. Brazil was mad at him, while in this rage he had, he went home and grabbed a gun and proceed to go back to the school and shoot his favorite teacher which resulted in his death.

***Figure B.4:*** Sarah's level of writing is above her classmates. She is able to articulate what she wants to say clearly and effectively. Writing two paragraphs such as these takes her half the time as it does her classmates.



**Figure B.5:** Sarah is able to observe her classmates with ease and document what is happening around her.

## Appendix C: Taylor's Work

### Semester 1 Reflection

For full credit, answer each question with a complete paragraph adding examples to support your answer. If your answer is too vague (ie: my semester was great! I did everything I was supposed to do...), you will not earn points for that statement or question.

1. Think back of Semester 1, what is one thing that stood out to you (please do not say too much homework as an answer)?

The way Ms.King always cared for our well-being was something that stood out to me from the very beginning. She always did all she could to help us out in any way possible whether it had to do with school or not. She tried her best and never gave up on us and that is something that stood out to me.

What was one plus (positive ) that you learned from first semester?

One positive i learned from first semester is that i always have friends that will have my back. This includes in and out of class. Another thing that i learned is that i should not procrastinate because it will just continue to get worse and worse. (I procrastinated writing this reflection)

What was one thing you would have like different from first semester?

I would have tried harder; a lot harder. I feel like i didn't give it my all. I feel like i could've done so much more instead of just settling for being average.

What is a lesson you learned about yourself that you will take into semester 2? What are some things you will continue to do or change?

I learned that i need to stop procrastinating and get things done early so that i do not have the time to procrastinate. I also learned that i should not settle and should instead work even harder for a grade that i know i can attain and one that i know i deserve. I will also continue to help my friends and allow my friends to help me.

**Figures C.1 and C.2: Taylor showing his ability to reflect on how he lets others help him and his desire to let others in more.**



**1.17 ELA Common Assessment**

1. Benevolent and benefit are related English words that come from Latin. What does benevolent mean?
  - a. Private and hidden
  - b. Harsh and harmful
  - c. Kind and generous
2. Commemorate and memory are related English words that come from Latin. What does commemorate mean?
  - a. To locate a place on a map
  - b. To correct a mistaken idea
  - c. To pay tribute to a past event
3. Regicide and regal are related English words that come from Latin. What does regicide refer to?
  - a. The murder of a king
  - b. The murder of a father
  - c. The murder of a son
4. Guise and disguise are related English words that come from Latin. What does guise refer to?
  - a. An unwelcome appearance
  - b. An external appearance
  - c. A celebrity appearance
5. Facade and face are related English words that come from French. What does facade refer to?
  - a. The basement of a building
  - b. The roof on a building
  - c. The front of a building
6. Virulent and virus are related English words that come from Latin. What does virulent mean?
  - a. Quiet and bashful
  - b. Wrong and shameful
  - c. Severe and harmful
7. Domicile and domestic are related English words that come from Latin. What does domicile mean?
  - a. School
  - b. Office
  - c. Home
8. Judicious and judge are related English words that come from French. What does judicious mean?
  - a. Creative
  - b. Wise
  - c. Spontaneous

**Figure C.3: Taylor's ELA Assessment. He clearly loves the color blue.**

Taylor- end of year work

- The brain isn't fully developed so they should not get life without parole
- if they kill someone on accident they should still get the same as if they did it on purpose
- The Thrill ~~to~~ kill kid acted ~~en~~like it was cool to kill.
- It's not cool to mess with the amendments.
- kids should get help if parents hurt them.
- you CAN OVER COME ~~ANYTHING~~ if you really want to
- kids are scared of facing the problem
- Get a Better Lawyer if he is a weak Lawyer.
- remember to know your rights or you will get ~~be~~ screwed over
- John is the G.O.A.T

Taylor P.2 end

show way to live right

- K gets attacked and team doesn't help.
- John spits facts because he is a cop.
- ~~the~~ We use our tax money to house these horrible people
- 

Figures C. 4 and C.5: Taylor's most recent work. His ability to coherently write down his thoughts has greatly improved since the beginning of the year.